

TOP STORY: QUENTIN TARANTINO'S VICARIOUS VIRILITY

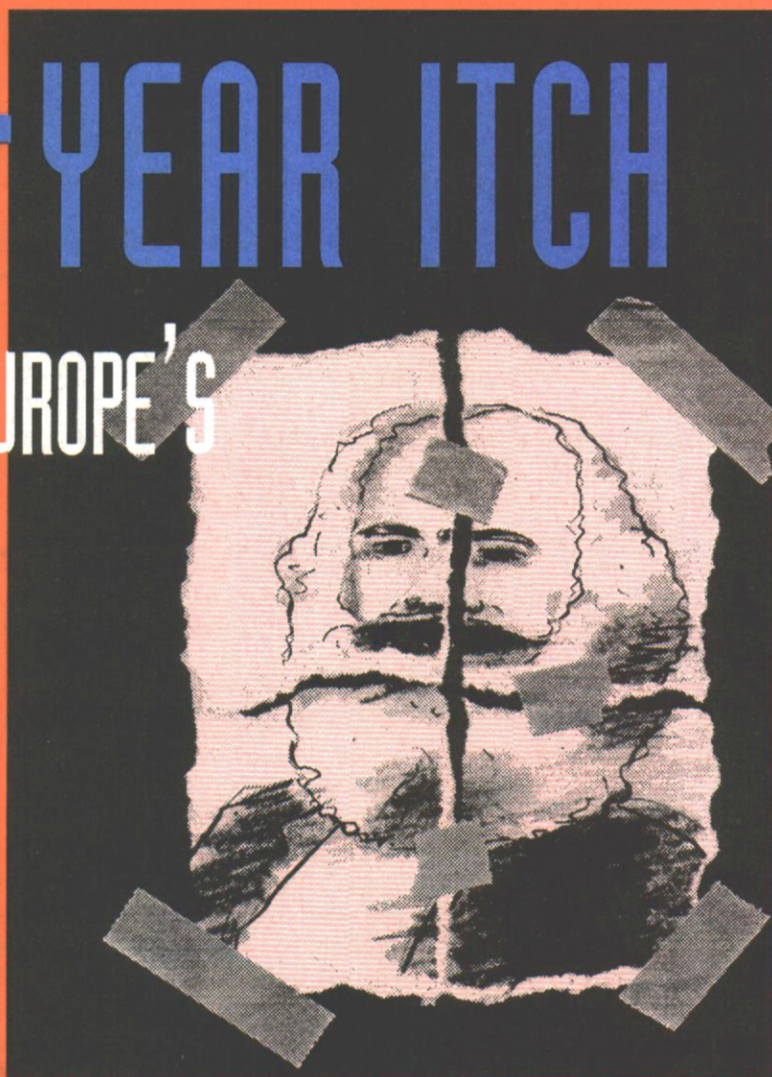
November 14 - 27, 1994

# In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## THE 5-YEAR ITCH

WHY EASTERN EUROPE'S  
EX-COMMUNISTS  
ARE GETTING A  
SECOND CHANCE



By Paul Hockenos  
PAGE 14

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# E D I T O R I A L

## HOW NOT TO BUILD A BETTER AUTOMOBILE

Just a year ago we reported that the Clinton administration was planning to use public research and development facilities to subsidize three of America's largest private corporations. In a move touted as an effort to "beat swords into automobile fenders," the administration established the Federal Advanced Research Projects Agency. The organization's first project was to give the Big Three auto manufacturers advanced technology in exchange for promises that the companies would "strive to build a car that goes three times farther than current models on the same amount of fuel."

Developed at taxpayers' expense by Cold War weapons laboratories, various technologies are now being given to the auto companies—along with lots of cash—in a large-scale welfare program known as the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles. The partnership involves minimal risks for the corporations but potentially huge profits for its executives and stockholders.

The subsidy consists of \$300 million per year, some of which is given directly to the three auto companies to help them develop non-polluting fuel cells, some to auto industry suppliers and some to the Energy Department to do research for these private corporations. Financing is being

split, with Washington (which is to say the taxpayers) funding the "riskier long-term projects," and the car companies taking over projects that come close to profitability. The rationale for this gift to the greedy, according to a draft summary of the agreement prepared last year by the White House, is that "risks are so high and rewards so delayed that the U.S. industry could not afford the investment."

Three weeks ago, the top executives of Ford,

Chrysler and General Motors met at the White House to celebrate with their benefactor. President Clinton said that this project was as important to the environment and to competitiveness "as anything we could be working on." And the chairman of Ford and vice presidents of Chrysler and GM, along with a United Auto Workers vice president, "glowingly" praised the effort, according to the *New York Times*.

Others have not been so happy about the program. Sheila Lynch, director of the Northeast Alternative Vehicle Consortium, a

Boston-based agency that gives grants to developers of vehicles that pollute less than gasoline-powered cars, argues that the Big Three auto companies don't deserve the subsidies. She objects to giving money to companies that have consistently opposed requirements for cleaner vehicles—as the Big Three are currently doing by suing to block New York, Massachusetts and Maine from requiring the gradual introduction of electric cars.

Furthermore, the program can do little to create the desired new generation of vehicles, says Bill Van Amburg, spokesman for Calstart, a nonprofit group trying to develop an electric car industry in California. This is no way to stimulate creativity, he says. "All this money is tied up in one pot with the veto power of the Big Three. How can you get innovation that way?"

The issue here is not government subsidies. Every major industry, especially in the field of transportation, has required and received large federal subsidies—canals in the early 1800s, railroads in the late 1800s, airlines and autos in this century. Nor is there anything wrong in subsidizing the development of electric or other alternatively fueled cars. The problem arises in the nature of the subsidies and the manner of their distribution. Last century, the Robber Barons built the transcontinental railroads, but at a tremendous financial, environmental and human cost. This century, after World War II, massive suburban highway construction subsidized the auto industry, but at the cost of inner-city atrophy.

Compared to those disastrous social side effects, this latest reliance on government for capital formation is trivial. But trivial or not, government subsidies should be used to benefit the widest number of citizens, not just the richest and most powerful. The goal of developing an environmentally friendly auto should be pursued democratically. Subsidies should be given to those who have taken the initiative without prompting, not to those who have done everything in their power to block such development.

In turn, that means that government subsidies should not be controlled by corporate bureaucracies, but by a public agency responsible to Congress. That agency should only distribute funds to those who demonstrate a serious desire to produce such a vehicle. That is how a government committed to both progress and democracy would proceed. ◀

***Government gifts  
of \$300 million  
a year to the  
Big Three auto  
companies are  
the wrong way  
to encourage the  
development of a  
non-polluting car.***

# IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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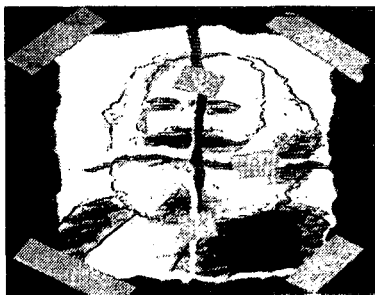
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# LETTERS

## At last, some sense

Congratulations for your editorial, "At last, a decisive move" (October 17). At last, too, a sensible statement in a left journal on President Clinton's ultimately correct policy on Haiti. Most of the other left publications in the country, transfixed by their traditional aversion to the American political system—as if it is the worst around—failed to recognize anything new or different this time. From *The Nation* to the successor weekly of the *Daily Worker*, all of these journals cited U.S. wrongdoings of 70, 50 or five years ago, but never considered

the changed circumstances and possibilities that arose with President Clinton, President Aristide and other new political forces on the scene. None of these very leftist publications was perceptive enough to realize that Clinton's policy on Haiti, despite its distressing inconsistencies, was, as you wrote, "unprecedented in the entire history of U.S. relations with its Southern neighbors..."

Who would deny now that the U.S. intervention with the proclaimed purpose of restoring Aristide to power quickly opened up space for the Haitian people to rally and demonstrate against the Cédras thugs? Or that the

Clinton administration's decision to fly in the exiled, legitimate senators—while barring the Cédras "senators" from entering Haiti's senate chamber—further emboldened the people's movement?

Yet these astounding developments didn't shake most of the left's old mindset. Even when Aristide publicly thanked Clinton, this was disregarded or prompted denunciations of the exiled president in some left quarters.

How incongruous it was that on October 15, when the Haitian people joyously celebrated Aristide's return, most U.S. left organizations and scribes spent their time griping and bellyaching about Clinton and Aristide. On the evening before Aristide's return to Port-au-Prince I was dismayed to hear from a young friend—who was taking part in a small "U.S. Get Out of Haiti" demonstration at the Federal Courthouse in New Haven—that Aristide was "only going to bring back capitalism to Haiti."

This October most of the U.S. left and the U.S. right were on the same side of the Haitian intervention issue, both groups viciously bad-mouthing Clinton. Is it any wonder that the left's influence in the United States has so diminished?

Sid Resnick  
Hamden, Conn.

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



## Population bombast

Thanks so much for your issue on overpopulation (*ITT*, September 5). I write on population for *Earth First!*, *Wild Earth* and others, and I think you guys struck just the right tone. Superb job!

I wish I could have written earlier to counteract the Alexander Cockburn pro-teenage pregnancy, neo-Marxist spew that is dished out by so many leftists. *ITT* and *Mother Jones* deserve awards for standing up to the bullies of the far left and far right and printing the simple truth: if world population keeps doubling every 40 years, there is not a species or ecosystem on earth that won't be affected in a tragic manner.

Thanks again for bucking the "politically correct" bullies.

**Bill McCormick**  
Charlottesville, Va.

## Body odor

David Moberg's article "Skin deep" (*ITT*, September 19) was a brilliant piece of investigative reporting on the Body Shop. Many, including myself, have been fooled by the company's clever marketing campaign. I consider myself a social investor, and take pride in having higher standards than most of the socially responsible mutual funds. Since quality information is difficult to obtain about many corporations, investing with a social conscience is a hit-or-miss venture. There are few businesses that truly lead the way to a new, "kind" marketplace, and many who promote environmentally friendly images while taking no actions to improve their destructive behavior. Separating the firms that are changing their behavior from the phonies is very difficult.

This is why we need more organizations that monitor business behavior like the Council on Economic

Opportunities. As Moberg's article pointed out, the German environmental organization *Oko-Test* and the British group *New Consumer* apparently found problems with the Body Shop early on. In order for the impact of the social investor to be realized, more of these organizations must be formed in America. Otherwise, social investing will remain in the dark ages.

**Phil Nicholas Jr.**  
Greenwich, N.Y.

## Gloom and doom

Ollie North (*ITT*, October 17) is an ideal representative of that type of candidate the Republican, evangelical right wing is supporting in their attempt to turn this country into a fanatical theocracy. Along with others, North will further enhance the ambitions and political agenda of this loony right wing.

If successful, North will be a prized asset in the right's assault on gays, liberals, environmentalists, feminists and humanists. The future political landscape will become polluted with North anti-isms, directed against any progressive cause.

With Ollie, the Republican Party will further evolve into what Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson envision in their sermonizing: an America enslaved in right-wing constructionism. Who's next? Rush Limbaugh!

**Leland Ruble**  
Toledo, Ohio

## Race and the free press

In "Dead wrong" (*ITT*, October 3), Salim Muwakkil argues that the relatively high level of intraracial violence that afflicts certain segments of black America cannot be addressed until such time as the communications media in this country will allow

it. And that not only means reporting the violence in a factually accurate manner—without tabloid grandstanding or more subtle forms of racism—but also genuine empathy for the victims (whose ranks seem to be swelling exponentially) and an honest effort to explore the roots of the problem.

Good luck.

During the three-day period at the end of August that Robert Sandifer (the 11-year-old boy who apparently shot 14-year-old Shavon Dean to death only days before he himself was allegedly murdered by fellow gang members) was on the run from police in his Roseland neighborhood on Chicago's far South Side, a Chicago talk-radio host named Don Wade was using his pulpit on WLS-AM radio to call for the 11-year-old's lynching.

Worse, Wade called on Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley to play the role of the boy's executioner, with the edifying event to be staged in full public view to serve as a lesson to all of the future Robert Sandifers out there. Of course, exactly what lessons a decent human being was supposed to draw from such a spectacle is another matter.

Wade even went so far as to state that the mayor should be sanctioned to tug on Sandifer's legs, thus ensuring that the hangman's noose worked to perfection, in case his lightweight body should spare him the death he deserved.

I suggest that maybe Don Wade should broadcast his hate-mongering show live for a whole year from one of the street corners between 2600 and 5500 South State Street, where the per capita income averages around \$2,000 annually, and the people who live there don't have the leisure to tell sick jokes about urban tragedies.

**David Peterson**  
Evergreen Park, Ill.

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.



# InSHORT



GLEO ERKENIMPACT VISUALS

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER?

**I**n the heady days of August 1989, after its historic election success, the Solidarity Trade Union invited Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs and his shock therapy program to Poland. Five years later, Solidarity is attempting to change the privatization law that Sachs convinced Poland to adopt.

Sachs initially won Solidarity support with

Miners march in support of Solidarity in 1990. The union's support is waning.



## Voters' priorities

The Milwaukee Bucks' inability to sign college basketball star Glenn "Big Dog" Robinson became an issue in the recent



re-election bid of Sen. Herb Kohl (D-WI), the owner of the team. As political

scientist David Littig explained to the Associated Press, Wisconsin voters were "irritated" by Kohl's unwillingness to meet Robinson's demand for an unprecedented \$100 million contract.

## Military preparedness

House investigators have discovered that Martin Marietta, the huge defense contractor, has charged the government

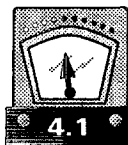


for "employee morale" expenses, including \$263,000 for a Smokey Robinson concert in

Denver, more than \$417,000 for the maintenance and operation of a recreational park for company employees at Oak Ridge, Tenn., and more than \$13,000 for one season of softball officials and scorekeepers at Oak Ridge.

## Next: Pol Pot Plaza

The Zairean government of Gen. Mobutu Sese Seko, known for its widespread violation of human rights, has



named a main street in the capital of Kinshasa after Emperor Bokassa,

the deposed tyrant of the Central African Republic who practiced cannibalism and murdered hundreds of schoolchildren who refused to wear his choice of uniform. And as Christopher Hitchens points out in a recent issue of *Vanity Fair*, the Mobutu government has also named a large stretch of water after Uganda's Idi Amin, who was responsible for the deaths of as many as 300,000 of his countrymen.

## The disease of disinformation

A public relations campaign promoting National Breast Cancer Awareness Month made no mention of the fact



that synthetic chemicals such as organochlorines have been linked to breast cancer, according to *Corporate Crime Reporter*.

The reason: Imperial Chemical Industries, the world's largest manufacturer of organochlorines, was the sole sponsor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

## APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Models Inc.-redible!
2. Infomercial irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-iculous
6. Ronal Cédra-tic
7. Ode North nasty
8. Holiday in Rwanda
9. Zhdanovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

simple answers and grand promises. His radical free-market policies would be relatively painless, he said, and would be rewarded by the West forgiving Poland's massive foreign debt. Sachs promised that if the government would privatize state firms, stop controlling prices, float the currency, cut the state deficit and control the money supply, Poles would soon enjoy prosperity.

Things have not worked out that way. Though President Clinton cheered the "Polish success" during his visit to the country this summer, reality for most Poles is bleak. Economic growth of 3.5 percent last year and 4.5 percent in the first half of 1994 hide the fact that industrial production had fallen 40 percent during the first two years of Sachs' plan. Unemployment is now 16 percent. About 60 percent of Poles recently reported that they were poorer this year than under communism. Only 20 percent said they live better today.

Solidarity leaders were originally attracted to Sachs' plan because they saw it as a way to destroy the power of the Communist Party. But, ironically, the disastrous reform program has ended up salvaging the political fortunes of the former communists while damaging Solidarity. The electoral success last year of the former communists and the Peasant Party—the two groups that now rule in a coalition government—was clear evidence of public outrage at shock therapy. Belief in the market—and in democracy—is dissipating rapidly.

Solidarity's political influence has clearly diminished. Technically, the labor group is not directly linked to any political party, but its allies in the United Party were swept from office last September. Solidarity's membership has also fallen from its peak of 10 million in the '80s to about 2.4 million.

To repair its reputation—and to avert social disaster—Solidarity has now decided to challenge the Sachs-inspired Mass Privatization Law, passed in the spring of 1993 but not yet implemented.

From the start, privatization of Polish state firms has been chaotic. During the rush to a market economy in 1989, some firms were sold to Communist managers for giveaway prices before laws were prepared. Since that time, some industrial enterprises have been sold to foreign interests, but most of them remain in the state sector as Poles have no capital and foreign buyers have little interest. The Mass Privatization Law would solve these problems by distributing stock from 600 to 800 industrial firms among 20 investment funds. Though employees would receive 15 percent of a company's stock, each fund would be the "lead" owner of about 30 firms.

Citizens would be the majority owners of the funds, but there's a catch. Because of the way the funds are structured—and because of the Polish economy's bleak prospects—average people would not receive profits for five to 10 years, if ever.

This past July, Solidarity convened a conference in Gdansk aimed at developing an alternative model that would give citizens and workers opportunities for more immediate financial gain. Though some local leaders supported employee ownership, most representatives favored direct transfer of enterprise ownership to all citizens, a system they called appropriation. Only this type of immediate increase in financial wealth would satisfy the society, they argued.

Yet representatives were unable to come up with a precise method for accomplishing this goal. And as *In These Times* went to press, Solidarity had yet to propose a formal plan.

This may be a turning point for Solidarity. The coalition that rules Poland has no new proposals for privatization or macro-economic management. This void, along with the general social disquiet, presents the union with a unique

opportunity.

Yet it is not clear that Solidarity can muster the internal organization and parliamentary influence to amend, much less replace, the law. The group is not allied with the governing coalition and has not been willing to join the former official unions in a new trade union movement. Solidarity has also been reluctant to cooperate directly with a new political organization, the Labor Party (UP), whose policies are more progressive than those of the former communists. The UP supports employee ownership but also is the most vigorous opponent of the Catholic Church's attempts to control Poland's social policy. Solidarity has associated with the Church from its inception.

The debate over mass privatization is forcing Solidarity to clarify its mission. Its actions in the next few months may reveal its future role in Polish affairs.

—Kenneth Zapp

## A KEY WIN FOR LABOR

**V**ictories for the labor movement have been few and far between in recent years. But the AFL-CIO is claiming one in an unlikely locale. And this success could have far-reaching ramifications for labor in the much-touted global factory.

It comes in the Dominican Republic, where labor unions recently won the first collective bargaining agreements in that country's export-processing zones, or EPZs. Since the '60s, the Dominican Republic has established 26 of these zones, where some 420 firms—most of them U.S.-owned or -affiliated—receive tax credits, tariff waivers and other incentives to set up shop. The EPZs' low-wage workers assemble apparel, electronics and other products for the U.S. market.

The Dominican Republic has the hemisphere's largest export assembly industry after Mexico, with some 160,000 workers, two-thirds of them women. Most earn the minimum wage of about 50 cents an hour. Dominican union organizers say the employers routinely violate health and safety regulations, deny basic amenities like sanitary facilities and clean drinking water, and subject women workers to sexual harassment.

For several years the AFL-CIO has been petitioning the U.S. Trade Representative to deny preferential access to products from the Dominican Republic. The labor organization's petition charged that assembly plants there were not living up to the terms of U.S. trade law, which requires that they meet internationally recognized labor standards. Almost a third of the Dominican Republic's \$2.2 billion in annual exports to the United States enter free or at reduced tariffs under the terms of the Generalized System of Preferences or the Caribbean Basin Initiative.

The Dominican Republic had recognized over 100 unions in the zones—but because the Dominican government was not enforcing its own labor laws, none of the unions had ever obtained a collective bargaining agreement. While the Bush administration acknowledged this fact, in 1992 it turned down the AFL-CIO petition, noting that the Dominican Republic had recently adopted a new labor code.

The AFL-CIO responded by filing another petition after it became clear that the new code was not being enforced. In July, U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor opted to continue the investigation on that petition, saying that the situation in the Dominican EPZs required further monitoring.

## MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

### Killer apps

Where's the "killer app"? That's what television, computer and phone companies want to know. These firms are busily studying the patchwork "information superhighway" in search of an "app," or application, that's sure to make money. Received wisdom says the secret's in entertainment, especially in pay TV, a service in which viewers custom-order movies and TV shows.

But a new survey by the magazine *Macworld* suggests that the public may be hungrier for civic and educational services than expected, and less enthusiastic about dial-up entertainment. The 600 adults surveyed were more interested in using interactive telecommunications for voting and polling, looking up reference information, distance learning and "going to meetings" than they were in ordering movies and TV shows on demand. Furthermore, more of them were ready to pay to use the info superhighway for education and voting than were ready to pay for a movie.

This result goes hand in hand with trends in the use of Internet and other on-line services. People use them, experts regularly note, more to communicate than purely to consume or harvest information. They want interactivity that goes beyond the "Visa or MasterCard" range of options available in a video-on-



demand relationship.

But carving out new potential public space on the spectrum will take a deep investment in infrastructure. Getting civic use of communications networks will take major taxpayer commitment, as well as a clear statement of the public's stake in new communications technologies.

## Early roadkill

With the recent demise of a congressional infobahn bill, S. 1822, public interest advocates fear the public may have lost a major opportunity to get even the first steps toward such commitments. The legislation would have set aside channel space for non-profit groups and created a new "universal service" fund to ensure everyone has access to the communications network of tomorrow.

Some telephone companies had opposed the bill, apparently holding out for more favorable legislation in a new session. And Republicans, led by Bob Dole (R-KS), fiercely denounced its public interest aspects. Dole called the bill "protectionist," with "excessive regulation," especially the "outlandish" nonprofit set-aside.

Sadly, Republican gains in the latest election may make even the modest provisions of S. 1822 seem utopian. Some advocates may now focus on local and state activism, such as efforts to influence utilities regulators.

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Then, surprisingly, the Dominican government of octogenarian President Joaquín Balaguer suspended the export license of one of the most notorious labor-law violators, the Bibong Apparel Corp. Balaguer, who has ruled the Dominican Republic for most of the past 30 years, has never been known for pro-labor sympathies. Bibong, a Korean-American firm, immediately stopped harassing union members. On July 22 the firm sat down with the National Federation of Free Zone Workers to sign the first collective bargaining agreement in the history of the Dominican EPZs. In August, the Caribbean Shoe Co. followed suit, and several firms signed interim agreements. Dominican workers have won other concessions as well, including the establishment of a tripartite commission to resolve labor disputes in the export-processing zones and an extension of the system of labor courts.

In view of the recent developments, the AFL-CIO has now withdrawn its petition with the U.S. Trade Representative, in part to be in better position to file a new petition should that become necessary. Kantor's office officially closed the case late last month.

David Jessup, the AFL-CIO's Director of Human and Trade Union Rights, called the Dominican victory a "historic development." "It's the first step in what will probably be a longer process," he acknowledged, "but it's an important step."

The AFL-CIO is all too aware that many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have established export-processing zones in recent years, and that the process is likely to accelerate with free trade agreements like NAFTA and GATT. Critics argue that such zones allow businesses to reap superprofits by eliminating jobs in high-wage countries, while contributing little to the Third World. But cooperation like that which resulted in victories in the Dominican Republic could change that equation.

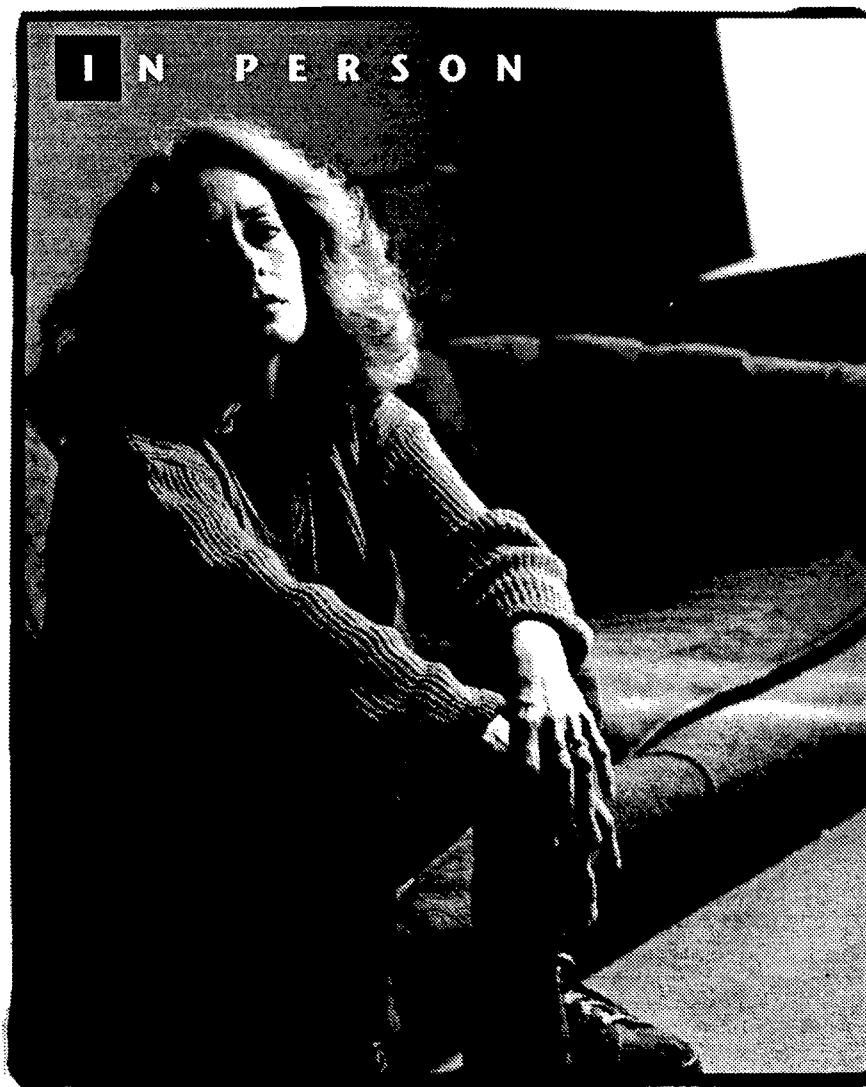
—Karl Bermann

## Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner



Senate is filled  
with empty suits.  
Congress reopens  
as men's shop.  
Ralph Lauren is  
majority leader.



©DAVID SCHULZ

## IN PERSON

### POETIC ENDURANCE

*Daisy Zamora and the  
revolution that was*

Nicaraguan landowners, Zamora fought in the Sandinista army and served as a government minister. Today, at 44, she's an acclaimed poet who describes herself as an ordinary housewife who stands in line for chicken.

Zamora's grandmother, inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald, had named her own daughter Daisy. This original Daisy, Zamora's aunt, wrote poetry and died tragically young. From her, Zamora inherited both the name and the muse. She drew her revolutionary inspiration from generations of patriarchs who had been involved for more than 100 years with Nicaragua's democratic rebellions. When she entered the university at age 16, she was elected to the congress of students and began her own political life.

During the late '60s the Somoza regime became increasingly brutal. The torture and assassinations of fellow students quickly radicalized Zamora. In the decade leading up to the Sandinistas' victory in 1979, she worked for the

"Sometimes," says Daisy Zamora. "I feel old, as if I had lived many lives."

Her patrician elegance is as genuine as her revolutionary ardor. After a protected, almost "magical" childhood in an old family of

## ETC.

By Jim McNeill

### Still hungry for justice

In 1954, bombs rained down on Guatemala's presidential palace as President Eisenhower's CIA launched a coup that unseated the country's democratically elected, but dangerously liberal, ruler.

Today, another American is making trouble outside Guatemala's presidential palace. But this time, it's trouble of a much different sort.

On October 11, Jennifer Harbury, a Harvard-educated lawyer began a hunger strike in front of the presidential palace on behalf of her husband, Efraín Bámaca Velásquez, a commander of Guatemala's guerrilla army, who disappeared in 1992. Harbury is demanding that the Guatemalan government provide an honest accounting of the whereabouts of her husband and 35 other rebels. Some witnesses say they have seen Bámaca and the others being held in secret military torture centers.

*In These Times* first wrote about Harbury and Bámaca in a July 25 profile. In that story, David Bryden explained how Harbury met Bámaca in 1990 while conducting interviews for a book about the lives of Guatemala's left-wing guerrillas. They married a year later. Bámaca disappeared during a firefight with the army in March 1992.

The Guatemalan military claims he was wounded and committed suicide before he could be captured. But investigators who exhumed the grave where the military said Bámaca was buried found the

body of another combatant.

The United Nations and the Organization of American States have both criticized Guatemala for not releasing credible information about Bámaca and the others. Harbury believes that the Clinton administration could force the Guatemalan military to account for the prisoners if it threatened to suspend Washington's close military and trade ties with the Central American nation. Currently, the U.S. National Guard conducts joint training exercises with the Guatemalan military. And the United States maintains a special trade relationship with Guatemala despite its abysmal human rights record.

Although Harbury's fast has begun to generate international press attention—in the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, Reuters and elsewhere—the administration has so far refused to impose sanctions. State Department officials say that Guatemala's signing of a human rights accord in March is a sign that the country is making important progress. But according to observers, attacks on labor leaders and other human rights violations have actually increased since then.

In order to pressure the administration, Harbury is asking Americans to contact their senators and representatives and urge them to suspend non-humanitarian aid to Guatemala until the country resolves cases such as Bámaca's.

For further information about Harbury's hunger strike, call the Washington-based Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA at (202) 529-6599.

Sandinista National Liberation Front organizing underground cells, transporting weapons, forging documents and setting up clandestine hospitals and political schools for the *compañeros*. She was instrumental in the intelligence effort that preceded the occupation of the National Palace in 1978. And during the September insurrection, she fought as the only female member in a combat unit.

Forced into exile during the last days of the revolution, Zamora made her way quickly back to the front, where her voice became known to every Nicaraguan as the voice of Radio Sandino.

In the first exhilarating years after the triumph, she worked at a feverish pace as vice-minister of culture under Ernesto Cardenal. "We made this miracle," she says, describing the literacy campaign that involved every school and student in the country and cut illiteracy by 80 percent in one year. Cardenal and Zamora fervently believed in the "socialization of the means of poetic production." They organized poetry workshops, publishing books of poetry written in the police station and in the fields, in the barracks and in the factories.

Today Zamora is less interested in telling her own story than in telling the story of her country. She lingers over the word "Nicaragua," as one speaks the name of a loved one. She wants to make sure her listeners understand the truly popular, nationalist nature of the revolution, and the tragedy caused by the United States' misguided support of the counterrevolution.

The low-intensity warfare, the strangling economic blockade and the hit-and-run actions against specific targets all drained the new government of energy and made economic planning impossible.

"You have been raised with your backs to your neighbors, to the rest of the continent," she admonishes her audiences in the United States, where she has been on a book tour for *Clean Slate*, a new edition of her poems in translation.

Zamora has spoken openly of her disillusionment with some of the Sandinista leadership. Even during the buoyant early days, she felt increasingly constrained, as she realized that the revolution had not put an end to a very unrevolutionary kind of politics. Unwilling to obey her party superiors unquestioningly, she was ultimately forced from office and never again allowed to hold an official position of power. Her decision to divorce Dionisio Marengo and remarry a less influential Sandinista economist further contributed to her banishment from the revolution's inner circle.

Today Zamora devotes some of her time to Nicaragua's growing feminist movement, which she sees as a source of a new and less corruptible kind of power. "We believe in a different form of power," she says, "Not power for the sake of power, but power to solve problems, to serve humanity."

Zamora reports with sadness that Nicaragua is returning to its past. "Nicaragua has gone so far backward that I am going to tell you something that sounds like something from García Márquez—the railroad has disappeared!" Illiteracy rates and mortality rates are on the rise. Schools and social programs are being closed. The sons and daughters of revolutionaries have reverted to the values their parents fought to transform. And while the masses suffer, a small circle of people who have both money and access to U.S. technologies indulge themselves in a "fantasy of progress."

Zamora continues to write poetry. And she has plans for a novel. Poetry is a political act, she says, like everything else. To her poetry and her politics she brings a reverence for revolution and an unquenchable hope for the future.

—Susan Kimmelman



# THE FIRST STONE

## TIME FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

By Joel Bleifuss

In 1992, candidates running for Congress spent \$678 million trying to gain office. The political action committees (PACs) and large individual donors who contributed the major share of that money were making a political investment that they knew would pay off. The \$678 million is just a fraction of the money at stake each year when Congress putters with environmental laws, price supports, tax breaks and pork barrels.

The system is corrupt and everybody knows it. Capitol Hill's recent refusal to pass even the most tepid campaign finance reform measure is an indictment not only of our indentured legislators, but of Bill Clinton's leadership. Rather than support meaningful change, the White House backed a package that was every bit as complicated and insubstantial as the administration's failed health care proposal.

Yet the electoral-reform community in Washington also deserves some of the blame. Groups that supported the Democratic reform package—most notably Common Cause, Public Citizen and the League of Women Voters—frittered away time and money supporting a fatally flawed plan.

One group that didn't back the administration's milquetoast effort was the Center for Responsive Politics, a resource center that works to expose the links between money and politics. Executive director Ellen Miller believes it is just as well that the Democratic package didn't pass. It would have only "locked into place the current system, thus letting up the steam on what is needed for more necessary reforms," she explains.

Miller points out that Congress created its reform plan by building on the status quo. For example, in 1992 an average House race cost \$543,000. The Democrats proposed a starting cap of \$600,000 on House races—that could escalate to \$1 million when all the "bells and whistles" were added. Similarly, in 1992 the average House member received 70 percent of his or her funding from large individual contributors and PACs. The reform package would have brought

that ratio down to 66 percent.

"Fundamentally, what was put forward as reform was not bold, creative or dramatic enough to galvanize genuine public support," says Miller. "And that, coupled with a reliance on an inside-the-Beltway lobbying strategy, meant that the proposal was doomed from the beginning."

Clearly, what is now needed is a redefinition of the campaign finance reform issue—a reconception of the relationship between money and politics.

Randy Kehler made a name for himself in the early '80s as a founder of the Nuclear Freeze campaign. In recent years he has turned his attention to the subject of money and how it corrupts

politics. Kehler, who lives in rural western Massachusetts, is a member of the Working Group on Electoral Democracy, a loose association of organizers who have come to realize that they were continually losing their political battles—not for lack of compelling arguments, but because they did not have the financial resources needed to get their message across.

"Up till now, the solutions have been much too timid and piecemeal," says Kehler. "The problem of money has been framed too narrowly as a good-government, clean-up-Washington kind of issue that people ought to care about because of an abstract democratic ideal. The Working Group's view is that this problem affects [those working for social change] first, before all the other huge issues. Because if there isn't some fundamental shift in the political process in favor of the people and away from money, then nine times out of 10 we will fight losing battles."

Kehler and his allies say that campaign finance reform should be posed as a political rights issue. "The right to vote, the right to run for office, the right to be fairly and equally represented by elected officials, all those rights are seriously abridged, if not denied, by the current system of privately financed elections," says Kehler. "We have massive political inequality that, among other things, has rendered the right to vote less than meaningful, and the right to participate in the political process on an equal basis less than real."

John Bonifaz, a lawyer in Boston who has worked as the staff attorney for the Center for Responsive Politics, agrees. He believes the day is dawning for a movement akin to, and as important as, the struggle for civil rights in the '50s and '60s. To that end Bonifaz established earlier this year the National Voting Rights Institute, which will mount legal challenges to the system of privately finance elections. The ultimate goal is to overturn a 1976 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Buckley vs. Valeo* that ruled that money equalled speech, and consequently legislative controls that would have set limits on how much a campaign can spend violate the First Amendment.

Bonifaz argues that people who do not have money also

have First Amendment rights that must be protected, rights that the current system of privately financed campaigns violates. "People have a right not to be drowned out by other people's speech," he says. He explains the gist of his legal challenge to *Buckley vs. Valeo*: "Today there is a wealth primary, like the white primaries of the past. Where yesterday the white primaries excluded people by their race, today the wealth primary excludes people on their lack of wealth and thus denies them their right to equal and meaningful participation in the process."

"The Supreme Court has erred in previous cases. *Buckley vs. Valeo* is comparable to *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the 1896 ruling in which the court articulated the separate but equal doctrine of the South that kept segregation in place. It took 58 years for that decision to be overturned."

Like Miller and Kehler, Bonifaz is critical of the Democrats' campaign finance reform package. "All it does is seal into place a system in which your credibility and your worth are based on your access to wealth. And that is completely contradictory to the principle of one person one vote," he says.

A sounder strategy would be to have fully financed public elections—no ifs, ands or buts.

"When that idea is sold as it should be, I think it will catch fire," says Bonifaz. "The [reform] leadership in Washington doesn't have that vision because they want a quick win. I think we have to be in it for the long term. We have to envision a new movement, a democracy movement."

Several obstacles stand in the way of such a movement, however. Bonifaz characterizes one as the "Horatio Alger Syndrome," in which progressive candidates are locked into the belief that they can—through hard work and political savvy—break through the money barrier and get elected. Says Bonifaz, "They are so involved in the electoral process they really, somewhere in their minds, believe that our elections are fair and honest."

So what about Minnesota's Paul Wellstone, who was elected to the Senate in 1990 using a classic grass-roots strategy and running on a progressive platform? Well, a good case can be made that Minnesota is different. The state has a sophisticated political culture, and its two political parties operate through a caucus system that encourages grass-roots participation.

Bonifaz and Kehler believe that Wellstone-like victories cannot be easily replicated. "Any rule has its exception, but if you kid yourself that the excep-

tions can be the rule, you are making a big mistake," says Kehler. "But it is unrealistic to expect that we will mount Wellstone campaigns all across the country."

Bonifaz puts it this way: "Money rules the day and will always rule the day until we change the system."

Money doesn't merely rule the electoral system; it is also crucial to the success of any large-scale political movement. Rich philanthropists—even those who fund progressive causes—are often not eager to change the rules of a game in which they are the biggest players.

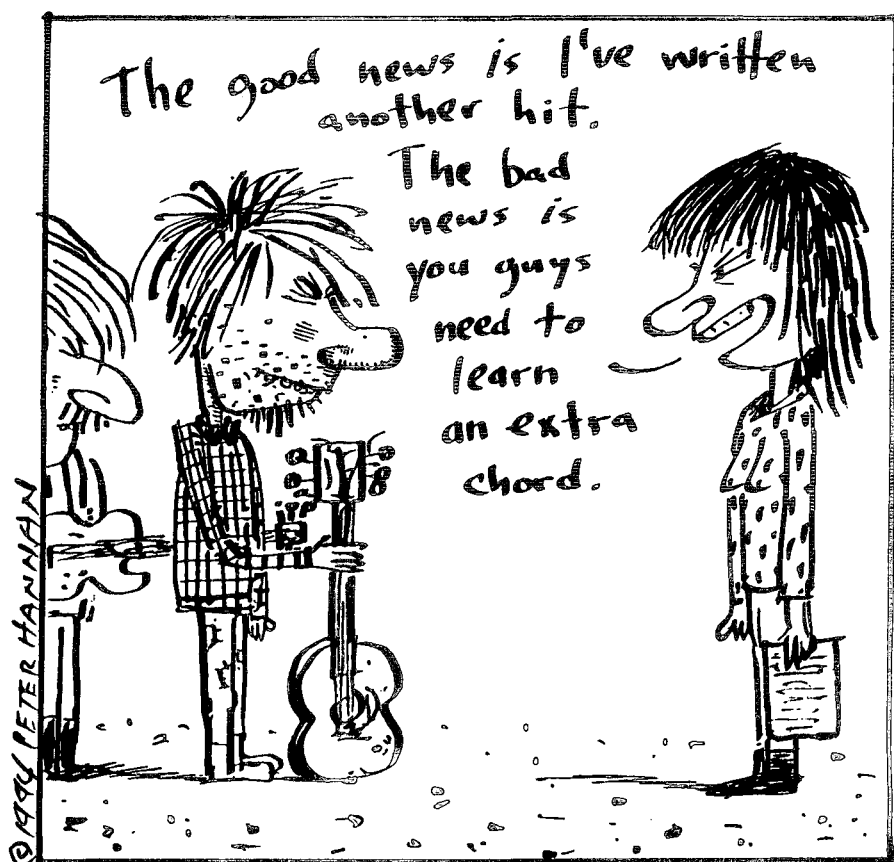
"What we are talking about," says Kehler, "is a shift in political power away from that tiny elite that virtually controls elections and the legislative process—the big money contributors. A shift that empowers the non-wealthy—and that disempowers the over-powered wealthy. I had a wealthy, progressive donor say to me once, 'You mean under the system you are proposing, I wouldn't be able to give large amounts of money when it is something I really feel strongly about?'"

Well, yes. Attitudes and perceptions about the role of money and politics must change. Miller likes to invoke Tom Paine, who once said, "The long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it the superficial appearance of being right."

*Next issue: a workable solution.*

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



**POLITICS**

# Skin-deep socialism

*Among Eastern Europe's resurgent former communists, opportunism is more important than ideology.*

By Paul Hockenos

**F**ive years after the collapse of communism, Eastern Europe's former communist parties, now calling themselves socialist, have made remarkable comebacks. In Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Belarus and elsewhere, they are back in power. In Serbia and Romania, versions of the communist parties never left office. In other countries they are prominent opposition forces.

Are Eastern Europeans really giving socialism a second chance? After short flings with liberal and nationalist governments, are they finished with the adventures of free-market capitalism and ethnic jingoism? Or are the ex-communists today pioneers of a progressive third way in regions more hospitable to the left than Western Europe?

The reform communist parties are so varied that there are no easy answers. In Hungary, the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP), formerly the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, pursues an economic program more market-oriented than that of its right-wing predecessor. After a brief experiment with isolating itself from Russia, the new Belarusian leadership, made up of hard-line former communists, wants to renew closer links with Moscow. In Serbia, Russia and elsewhere, the heirs of Marx and Lenin endorse nationalism almost as fiercely as the far right, with whom they periodically ally themselves.

The natures of the post-communist parties today reflect each country's national traditions, as well as the forces within the party that emerged as dominant when the *ancien regimes* went under. In Serbia, nationalists took over the party in the mid-'80s by fanning nationalist passions over Kosovo, Serbia's Albanian-populated southern province. In eastern Germany, where the dethroned Socialist Unity Party had no chance of regaining power, its successor, the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), had nothing to lose by reclaiming Marx and Rosa Luxemburg. In Poland, Hungary and Lithuania, the reform communists made convincing transitions into parliamentary democratic parties.

The ruling parties in Soviet Eastern Europe and the Balkans were always heterogeneous. In Romania, Ceausescu's "national communism" relied upon a bombastic national chauvinism that one would never have heard in East Germany or Czechoslovakia. Since the late '60s, the state parties of Hungary and Poland tolerated liberal-minded and left-wing reformers, the likes of whom would surely have been, or were, purged in other countries.

Along with dedicated socialists and unideological opportunists, all the communist parties had factions of national populists that fused nationalism with communist rhetoric. Today, without the standard party line, the post-communist parties encompass even broader, often unwieldy, spectrums of opinion. Under the same banner sit old-school communists, professional but compromised technocrats, national socialists and young left-wing idealists.

Certainly, none of the reform socialist parties is identical to their predecessors. With few exceptions—most notably Serbia—the old guard immediately stepped down or was expelled during the democratic revolutions. In most cases, the new leaderships sincerely renounced the principles that underpinned the dictatorships: single-party rule, media censorship, state-run unions and police terror. Rhetorically, at least, all of the new offspring profess a commitment to pluralism and the rule of law.

Nevertheless, they chose not to dissolve the parties com-



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pletely and begin anew, or to join the young liberal, green or social democratic parties. All of the former communist parties insist they are "left." But while Hungary's HSP liberals and Russia's national Bolsheviks both speak in the name of "socialism," "social democracy" or "social market economics," their ideologies are amorphous and undefined, shallow in historical precedent and theoretical substance.

The born-again socialist parties wasted little time settling upon new political orientations. "We don't have time for ideology," Hungary's new prime minister, Gyula Horn, liked to say during this spring's election campaign. Parties like Horn's became "social democratic" overnight, in countries in which 10 years ago social democracy was a political heresy on par with Titoism and Trotskyism.

Opportunism more than anything else has guided the reform communist parties' transitions. In opposition, they are the outspoken voice of protest against the most painful, unpopular consequences of the market reforms. Their demands for the maintenance of jobs, pensions, child care, industrial subsidies and so forth are legitimate. But without concrete programs to back them up, the ex-communists offer an empty populism that is not so different from the demagoguery of the nationalist right. Like the right, when they come to power, their promises dissipate and they adopt little-changed versions of the existing economic policies.

Even in the most democratic of the post-communist parties—such as Poland and Hungary—the vestiges of their forerunners' traditions continue to resurface. While some factions within these parties have tried to adopt ideas of the Western left, or noncommunist socialist traditions in their own countries, the majority of ex-communists are terribly ill at ease with concepts as foreign as grass-roots democracy, civil society, human rights or multiculturalism. In Romania, for example, the ruling party—comprised primarily of reform communists—refuses to repeal the communist-era law prohibiting homosexuality.

The former communist parties publicly endorse the formal rules of liberal democracy without really grasping the essence of liberal or social democratic values. The result is that when they come to power they adhere formally to democratic procedure without fostering the processes that make a society democratic, such as press freedom, constructive public discourse, or the inclusion of independent interest groups in public policy matters. If not explicitly, at least implicitly, their thinking also belies a nostalgia for the paternal party and the strong state that will set things right again. The parties themselves remain hierarchical and male-dominated. The reformers have been so intent on making political comebacks that they've neglected to reflect upon the essential logic of the ideology that molded their thinking and actions over four decades.

The lines of continuity within these parties are explained to a large degree by the continuity of their personnel. When the old generals moved aside, the second tier took over. Although the brash, charming Jewish lawyer Gregor Gysi stands at the front of Germany's PDS (as well as on nearly every PDS poster plastered across Berlin), behind him are the familiar rows of old cadre. Even in the best of cases, such as Poland and Hungary, the ranks of qualified, untainted people are embarrassingly thin.

The unwillingness of these parties to confront their pasts can also be explained by the personal histories of their members. Leaders may criticize the excesses of Stalinism, but rarely if ever do they discuss their party's complicity—or their own—in the suppression of opposition, the destruction of the environment or the mismanagement of the economy. Their most glaring failure is a refusal to address, much less take steps to redress, the activities of the secret police forces under communism. The ethical questions surrounding the informant networks and the persecution of dissidents, for

example, are nowhere on these parties' agendas. To this day, Hungary's Horn, a liberal reformer as sincere as any in Central Europe, will not publicly apologize for his role as a member of the Hungarian paramilitary police squads that helped the Soviets quash the Hungarian uprising in 1956. Horn also refuses to accept an offer from the daughter of Imre Nagy, the murdered prime minister of the 1956 revolution, to observe a minute of silence with her at her father's grave.

Yet the democratic deficits of the post-communist parties are simultaneously a source of their popularity. In the reform communist parties, the people tied to the discredited regimes find a justification for their life's work, as well as absolution for unethical actions. They can say that what they were working for, socialism, was something basically good, a benevolent ideal that hard-liners took down a wrong path, against their will. By calling upon the tradition of the "left" or "socialism," they draw a line of continuity from the past, their past, to the present. When German Chancellor Helmut Kohl rolls out the red carpet for Hungary's Horn (in marked contrast to the way Kohl's party treats the PDS' Gysi), the average Hungarian is relieved of critical reflection upon his or her actions under the dictatorship.

Of course, the main reason for the reform parties' resurgence has been their ability to turn to their advantage the discontent that the economic and political transitions have produced. Privatization, denationalization and opportunities for free enterprise have created a small but highly visible *nouveau riche*, as well as another larger strata that has benefited economically from the changes. But for most people, life is harder. The post-communists have effectively turned their parties into camps for the have-nots.

Yet it is not simply the unemployed and the poor that cast their votes for the reformed parties. The changes of the past five years have given the average person deep feelings of insecurity. Even people who are better off now are anxious about the future in a way that they had never been before. Although the reform communists and the right exploit this disenchantment, it is the democratic forces in Eastern Europe, including former dissidents like Vaclav Havel, that bear the responsibility for coupling democracy and the free market so closely. In doing so, they made it easy work for right and left populists to discredit democracy as something synonymous with unemployment, poverty and suffering, just as the old communist parties had claimed.

Many progressives in the West have hailed the return of the ex-communist parties as evidence that Central and Eastern Europe is not as numb as it first appeared to the possibility of a leftist project. And indeed, the initial euphoria over market capitalism has worn off quickly. Eastern Europeans have not uncritically accepted Western assumptions about "natural" rates of unemployment, consumer culture or societies based on profit and divided by gross inequalities of wealth. But if they don't see capitalism as the end of history, they also don't have a democratic socialist vision to replace it.



If democratic socialism is to have any chance at all in the countries of the former Eastern bloc, its impetus must come from outside the reform communist parties, which, regardless of their intentions, are incapable of extricating themselves from the political culture of their past. The process must begin at the grass-roots level, drawing together like-minded progressive interest groups, as did the Labor Party (UP) in Poland. The UP, which includes former Solidarity activists, former communist party members, progressive intellectuals and organizers from Poland's pro-choice campaign, received a surprising 7 percent of the vote in the 1993 general election. It is the only opposition party that consistently and constructively criticizes the pro-privatization policies of the ruling "socialist" coalition, as well as the political incursions of the Catholic Church. (See story on page six.)

A left-wing alternative is possible in the ruins of post-communist Eastern Europe only if there is a political culture to support it. In some countries, like Poland, the vague contours of such a political culture exist, which is enriched and consolidated by the UP, the Solidarity-rooted trade unions and movements such as the abortion referendum campaign. Elsewhere, it will be an even longer and more arduous task, hindered, not expedited, by the heirs to the communist parties. ◀

Paul Hockenos is the author of *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Routledge).

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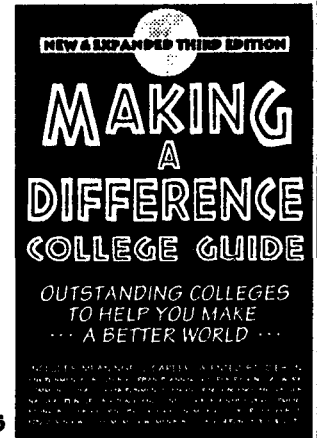
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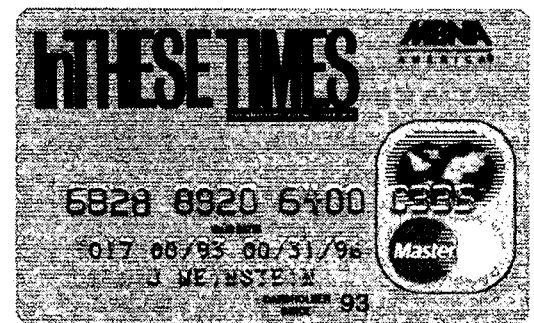
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## RUSSIA

# Soldiers of misfortune

**H**ammered by corruption scandals, thinning ranks, sagging morale and impoverishment, Russia's once-proud military machine is waging a battle for survival that some fear could become a struggle for power.

*A cash-strapped and demoralized military leadership is beginning to talk openly about a coup.*

By Fred Weir  
MOSCOW

*In recent months, the American press has printed many stories detailing the wild gyrations of the Russian economy. But too few accounts have perceptively examined the social and political significance of Russia's economic turmoil. In the following two stories, Fred Weir explores the impact of this instability on two key Russian institutions—its military and its health care system.*

"The mood in Russia's armed forces is one of complete dejection," noted *Krasnaya Zvezda*, a publication that speaks for the army leadership.

The sorry state of Russia's military hit world headlines recently when a Moscow utility company shut off electricity to the command center of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces in an apparent attempt to force payment of unpaid bills. If emergency backup

systems had not automatically switched in, the former Soviet Union's vast nuclear missile arsenal might have found itself defeated by capitalism in a way its creators never could have imagined.

A few days later, the Arctic nuclear submarine center of Severodvinsk was plunged into darkness after fuel supplies ran out. Officials say power cutoffs to impoverished bases are a commonplace occurrence these days.

Nonpayment of energy bills could be the least of the troubled military's problems. Its own experts say the armed forces would have needed 60 trillion rubles (\$25 billion) this year just to maintain minimal standards of military readiness. But the 1994 government budget set aside just 40.6 trillion rubles (\$16.7 billion), of which a meager 14 trillion rubles had actually been turned over to the Defense Ministry by September.

The long bout of starvation rations appears to have vaporized discipline, dangerously slashed military living standards and encouraged embittered generals to project their problems—and ambitions—into the

once-forbidden political arena.

The Russian armed forces, which numbered 2.6 million in 1992, are currently in the midst of deeply resented personnel reductions, which are projected to bring overall strength down to a more manageable 1.5 million by next year.

But there is little likelihood that the bane of Russian youth—universal conscription—will be abolished anytime soon. Life for tens of thousands of young men inducted annually into the Soviet army was pure hell, and by most accounts little has changed in the new Russian forces.

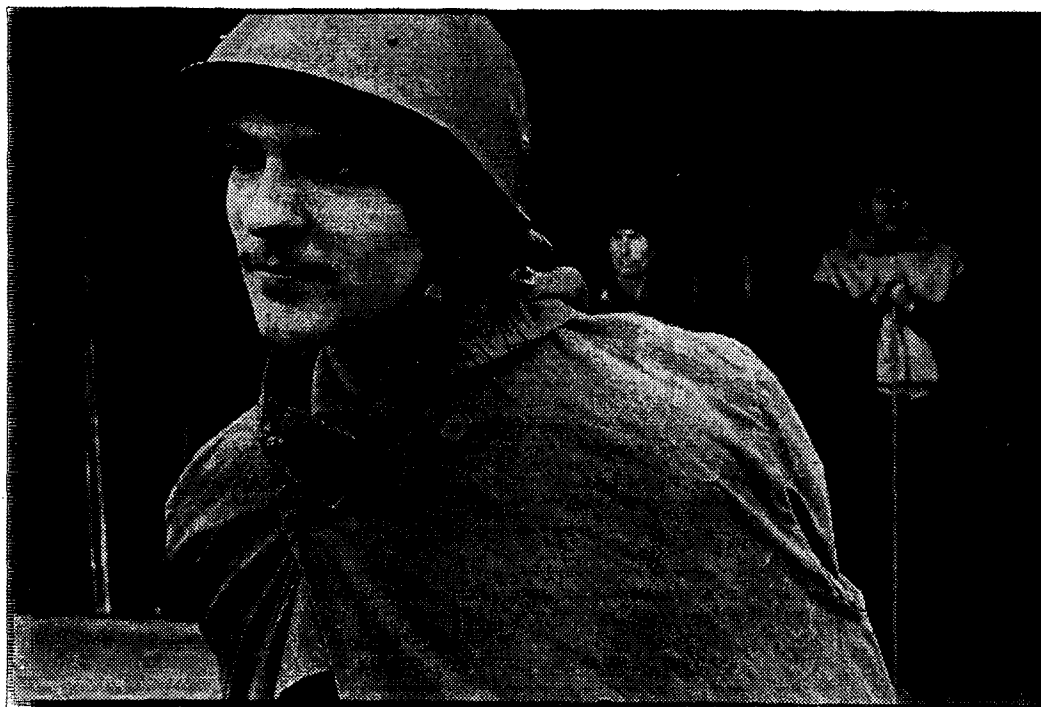
Brutal and systematic hazing of new recruits by officers and noncoms is reportedly widespread. The military prosecutor's office admits that "accidents and natural causes" claimed 2,500 soldiers' lives last year, an extraordinary figure for a peacetime army. But the Organization of Soldiers' Mothers, a dogged critic of the military, says closer to 5,000 died, most from the effects of hazing.

The lot of officers would seem little better. They must make do on a monthly salary that averaged just 120,000 rubles (\$50) in mid-1994. Even this is often delayed for months at a time.

"This September the pockets of some 30 percent of Russian army officers are empty," *Krasnaya Zvezda* reported recently. "Many officers are compelled to work as janitors and street cleaners after completing their daily service."

Increasingly, frustrated soldiers are turning to crime to make ends meet. A recent series of investigative reports by the weekly *Moscow News* suggests that

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year by instructing the army to intervene in his dispute with the former legislature. The spectacle of tanks and troops storming the parliament building humiliated many military officers, but also sharpened their political instincts and, ironically, turned them toward some of the very politicians they had been ordered to attack.

A survey cited by *Moscow News* following last December's parliamentary elections found that a staggering 38 percent of Russian servicemen voted for the ultra-nationalist and neo-imperialist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, compared

illegal private business, theft, embezzlement, smuggling, bribe-taking and other criminal activities have reached epidemic proportions inside Russia's beleaguered armed forces.

A secret memo prepared for Defense Minister Pavel Grachev and leaked to the paper revealed that "billions of rubles are flowing from the military budget into commercial banks and other entrepreneurial structures. ... Despite the knowledge of their superiors, officers openly engage in commercial activities at their place of residence in military cantonments. No actions have been taken against them."

So far this year, military prosecutors have investigated cases of thefts and embezzlement totalling 65 billion rubles (about \$30 million). But that is only the tip of the iceberg, the paper said.

Most alarmingly, a growing number of cases involve troops selling off their own weapons and combat equipment stolen from military stores. Over the past year, hundreds of pistols, submachine guns, grenade launchers and other arms have been illegally sold to businessmen, organized criminals and private individuals, *Moscow News* said.

Military brass have responded to these charges with thinly veiled—and unprecedented—public warnings that the army's loyalty is not unlimited. "Stealing and filching are directly connected with the government's failure to fulfill its obligations to those who serve it," a toughly worded editorial in *Krasnaya Zvezda* argued recently. "The obligation to pay for the people's labor is among the most elementary."

The specter of a military uprising, though unlikely, clearly has the Kremlin worried. Disaffection in the ranks has been rife since the collapse of the USSR brought an ignominious end to military superpower status.

But President Boris Yeltsin opened Pandora's box last

to 23 percent of the population as a whole. Ironically, the angry anti-Yeltsin vote was highest in those military formations that had participated in the October 4 attack on the Russian parliament.

"Opposition sentiments in the army are widespread," the independent *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted recently. "This tendency has been stressed in army counterintelligence reports. President Boris Yeltsin has long realized that the army is unreliable and has drawn the proper conclusions."

According to the newspaper, Yeltsin is setting up an extraordinary force of 52,000 crack troops within the Moscow Military District to protect the seat of government in the event of renewed political conflict. They will receive special pay and ration supplements and will be trained in "street fighting, storming buildings and suppressing mass disturbances."

The new units will bypass regular channels of command and will be able "to resolve combat tasks autonomously," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported.

But a separate force to defend the Kremlin offers cold comfort for those who worry about the consequences of military breakdown for Russia's already deeply compromised democratic institutions. The nightmare was given flesh, and a name, recently when the army's most popular general went public with his chilling view that Russia's spiralling social and economic crisis can be reversed only by iron-fisted military dictatorship.

"In general, I'm not one to praise [former Chilean military tyrant Augusto] Pinochet," Gen. Alexander Lebed, the 14th Army commander who is often credited with ending a 1992 civil war in the ex-Soviet republic of Moldova, told the daily *Izvestia* in July. "But what did [Pinochet] do? He

saved the state from total collapse and put the army in a place of pride. With its help, he forced people to get back to work. The loudmouths were forced, and forced in a brutal manner, to shut their mouths," he said.

Though he denied any personal ambitions, Lebed left no doubt as to his meaning. "Life here forces the generals into politics," he said. "In our country, every question is political."

And he warned that unless the state "takes necessary steps to provide the army with normal conditions," there is a 50 percent chance of military revolt in Russia.

Despite these remarks, Yeltsin refused to fire Lebed, who is hugely popular among Russian servicemen. Yet while Yeltsin's decision to stand by Lebed may have raised the president's stock in the army, it did little to relieve concerns over the military's growing political assertiveness.

"In a critical situation Russia's young generals, whose interests are expressed, consciously or unconsciously, by the commander of the 14th Army, will clearly be free of ... pacific complexes," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* commented. "Since the October events last year they have overcome the syndrome of unquestioning obedience."

"They no longer respect political authority. They have combat experience, gained in hot spots around the former USSR, and are ready for resolute action. Through Lebed's mouth, they have stated their right to a say in formulating policy."

Fred Weir writes regularly from Russia for *In These Times*.

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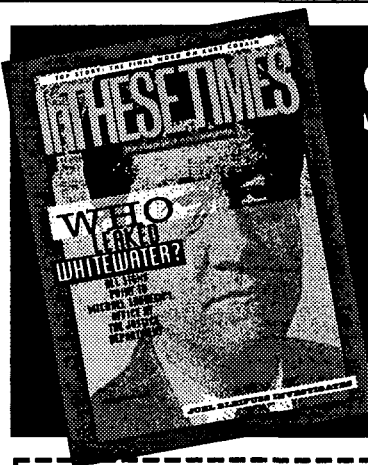
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# R U S S I A

## Failing health

O

nce, not very long ago, the women's therapy unit at Moscow's First City Hospital was a specialized recuperation ward for patients with ulcers and high blood pressure. Today it more resembles a charnel house.

*Shock therapy  
has sent the  
country's  
medical system  
into a coma.*

By Fred Weir  
MOSCOW

"Life has changed, and people with such relatively minor health problems are too busy with economic survival to come here," says Vladimir Anisimov, the unit's head doctor. "We are now receiving a flood of very different patients, suffering from a disease we cannot treat."

Svetlana, a 37-year-old homeless alcoholic, sits for hours staring dumbly at the wall and singing tunelessly. Natalya, a 91-year-old abandoned by her family last month, lies listlessly on the next cot, her body covered with bleeding, untreated bed sores. Ten people are packed into a space barely large enough for two. The stench of human excrement,

body odor and vomit is overpowering.

"None of these people belong here," says Anisimov. "But we are the only institution that stands between them and death in the streets. All we can do is take them in. We have no resources to care for them."

Nowhere is Russia's post-Soviet social disaster more visible than in the growing squalor and collapse of its once-proud hospitals. Although it never provided Western standards of quality, the former Soviet Union created a universal system of health care, a highly specialized hospital network and a vast cadre of reasonably well-trained medical personnel.

"The Soviet health care system was once developed without financial restrictions," says the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' 1993 annual report on Russian health care. In the '60s, the Soviet Union spent about 6.5 percent

of its annual budget on health care. By the mid-'80s that had fallen to around 4 percent. But since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian government spending has shrunk drastically, and the proportion of state funds devoted to health care has plummeted to barely 1.7 percent of this year's budget. Hospital administrators complain that even this meager funding is not materializing. Crucial purchases, repairs and even payment of staff salaries often have to be postponed, they say.

Under the impact of financial trauma, Russia's hospitals appear to be degenerating into little more than holding tanks for a growing wave of refugees from the tough three-year-old market reform program.

"At today's prices, we cannot afford medicines, supplies and equipment to maintain minimal standards of care," says Sergei Bakhavalov, acting chief doctor of the First City Hospital, once a model of the Soviet health care system. "At the same time, we find ourselves overrun with a completely new type of patient, who have what we call 'social diseases': homeless people, drug addicts, alcoholics and helpless elderly people. Most of these problems hardly existed five years ago. We haven't got the capability to deal with them."

Hospital care in Russia is still state-supported and theoretically free, but availability and quality of care in the public sector are falling sharply. A survey conducted in August by the independent Russian Center for Public Opinion found 76 percent of Russians "very dissatisfied" with the state of public medical services.

Government plans to create a comprehensive network of private health insurance schemes to replace the Soviet universal system have also failed to materialize. Hundreds of companies are already operating in the market, but so far

they serve only the tiny fraction of the Russian population that can afford to pay premiums, which typically cost from several hundred to a thousand dollars annually.

Most former elite medical facilities—such as Moscow's huge Kuntsevo hospital complex—admit only those whose organizations can pay for insurance schemes, just as they once served only patients of a certain nomenklatura rank. In these select institutions, former standards are generally maintained—thanks in part to private insurance income, but also to continued lavish state support.

Additionally, a few private Western-style hospitals have started in recent years, serving the new rich and foreign business community. But access to these is unthinkable for ordinary Russians, whose average monthly salary is the equivalent of about \$130.

For example, one private Western-run health clinic, opened in the Russian capital last spring, charges a \$1,000 annual membership fee, plus \$60 per visit. Consultation with a specialist costs \$150 and an ambulance ride is \$200.

For the majority, falling living standards and crumbling public infrastructure have created a dire health crisis, warns a report recently released by Russia's health ministry. Poverty, malnutrition, sharp increases in industrial and traffic accidents, and spiraling rates of alcoholism caused the 1993 death rate to jump to 14.6 deaths for every 1,000 people, a 20 percent increase in comparison with 1992. The 1993 birthrate was 9.2 births for every 1,000 people, or a fall of 14 percent, the report said. Compared to the previous year, life expectancy fell in 1993 from 62 to 59 years for men and from 73.8 years to 73.2 years for women. Infant mortality rose to almost 20 per thousand live births, a 12 percent rise from 1992.

Preventable diseases that were virtually unknown for decades, such as cholera, polio, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis and typhus, have reappeared in Russia, placing new burdens on a medical system that increasingly cannot cope. Russia's State Committee for Epidemiological Surveillance recorded 3,900 cases of diphtheria in 1992. The figure leapt to 15,210 cases in 1993 and tripled again to almost 48,000 in the first six months of this year alone. A cholera epidemic that raged across southern Russia and Ukraine this summer died down thanks more to the end of hot weather than to the official medical response, doctors say.

The incidence of syphilis jumped 165 percent in 1993 to 37,217 cases. Medical officials say sexually transmitted diseases are running out of control, thanks to woefully inadequate sex education, backward and ineffective clinical procedures, and a dearth of affordable condoms on the Russian market. So far, Russia has reported fewer than 2,000 cases of HIV infection. However, notes the Red Cross study, "with a blatant and raging gonorrhea upsurge, strongly indicating that unprotected sex is very common, far bigger numbers of HIV carriers as well as AIDS cases could have been expected. One possible explanation is that this disease is gravely underreported, something many other countries experienced in the earlier days of the outbreak."

The perils of Russia's new consumer market have created yet another new type of patient. "We increasingly see cases of severe poisoning, due to two main causes: bad vodka and phony medicines," says Bakhvalov.

A government commission recently found that over half of all vodka sold in Moscow shops is counterfeit—mostly tap water mixed with grain spirits, but in some cases contaminated with methyl alcohol, which can cause blindness.

Domestic production of pharmaceutical products has plunged by more than one quarter since 1991, and Russia now makes only 536 of the 1,227 medicines deemed "vitaly important" by the Ministry of Public Health. The loss of familiar—and inexpensive—brands has created massive shortages in hospitals and licensed pharmacies, driving people into the open market in search of medicines. Among the many supposedly brand-name imported drugs readily obtained in Moscow shops are a disturbing number of mislabeled substances, products beyond their expiration date and even poisonous fakes, says Bakhvalov.

Meanwhile, Russian pharmaceutical companies are positioning themselves to serve export markets rather than maintaining less-profitable production of old brands for domestic use, doctors complain. "Russian drug manufacturers seem interested only in getting their international GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) certificates for a few exportable products," says Carol Jacobsen, a medical aid expert working with the International Red Cross in Russia.

Unlike most Third World states, Russia does not suffer from an absolute shortage of infrastructure, resources or trained personnel to address its health crisis. What it lacks is sufficient political will and a viable plan to gradually shift the highly specialized and top-heavy system inherited from the Soviet Union to one that will maintain universal access and address the basic medical requirements of the population.

"We are heading for a situation of high-quality care for a small elite, and almost nothing for the majority," says public policy analyst Ivan Smolenkov. "The system of local polyclinics and paramedical facilities, which was badly underfunded in the later Soviet years, is now disappearing completely. Some clinics are even being turned into commercial shops or business offices."

Jacobsen agrees. "What they most need in this country is to build up primary health care at the community level," he says. "They have the means to do this, but they are not doing it."

Meanwhile, Russia's most precious medical assets—its doctors—appear increasingly fed up with collapsing conditions and salaries that average less than \$100 per month. They are getting out of the medical profession or leaving the country altogether.

"A lot of my colleagues have emigrated to the West," says Gennady Baranok, a 36-year-old general practitioner. "I don't blame them. There is nothing hopeful here." ◀

Fred Weir writes regularly from Russia for *In These Times*.

# False teeth

**F**ernando Castro Hernandez used to be in charge of hazardous waste disposal at General Electric's (GE) small motor plant in Juarez, Mexico. In May 1993, however, Castro refused to falsify company safety reports and he was demoted to the production line. There, he says, workers were talking union. Castro got involved. In November 1993, one week after his picture appeared in a union newspaper, Castro was fired. So were roughly 120 other pro-union workers.

*The first hearing held to enforce NAFTA's labor safeguards shows the treaty has very little bite.*

By Peter White

When President Clinton pushed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) through Congress last year, he promised reluctant lawmakers that this kind of abuse would be outlawed by a labor side agreement that was negotiated as a supplement to the original treaty. That side agreement, the North American Agree-

ment on Labor Cooperation (NAALC), established a hearing process that could be used to protest labor violations in the United States, Canada and Mexico, the treaty's three signers.

GE's treatment of its Juarez workers and similar tactics used by Honeywell at a thermostat plant in Chihuahua prompted cross-border union organizers to file the first two labor grievances under NAALC last February. But the outcome of that grievance—which led to no action against either company—has unions fearing that NAALC is a toothless safeguard.

The National Administrative Office (NAO), the agency established to enforce NAALC's provisions, decided that it did not have the authority to impose sanctions on GE or Honeywell. Labor Secretary Robert Reich also refused to intervene—suggesting that in a post-NAFTA world, corporations will be free to move across national boundaries at will and leave higher wage, health and environmental standards behind. The NAO's failure to act has left American unions increasingly skeptical about similar “protections”

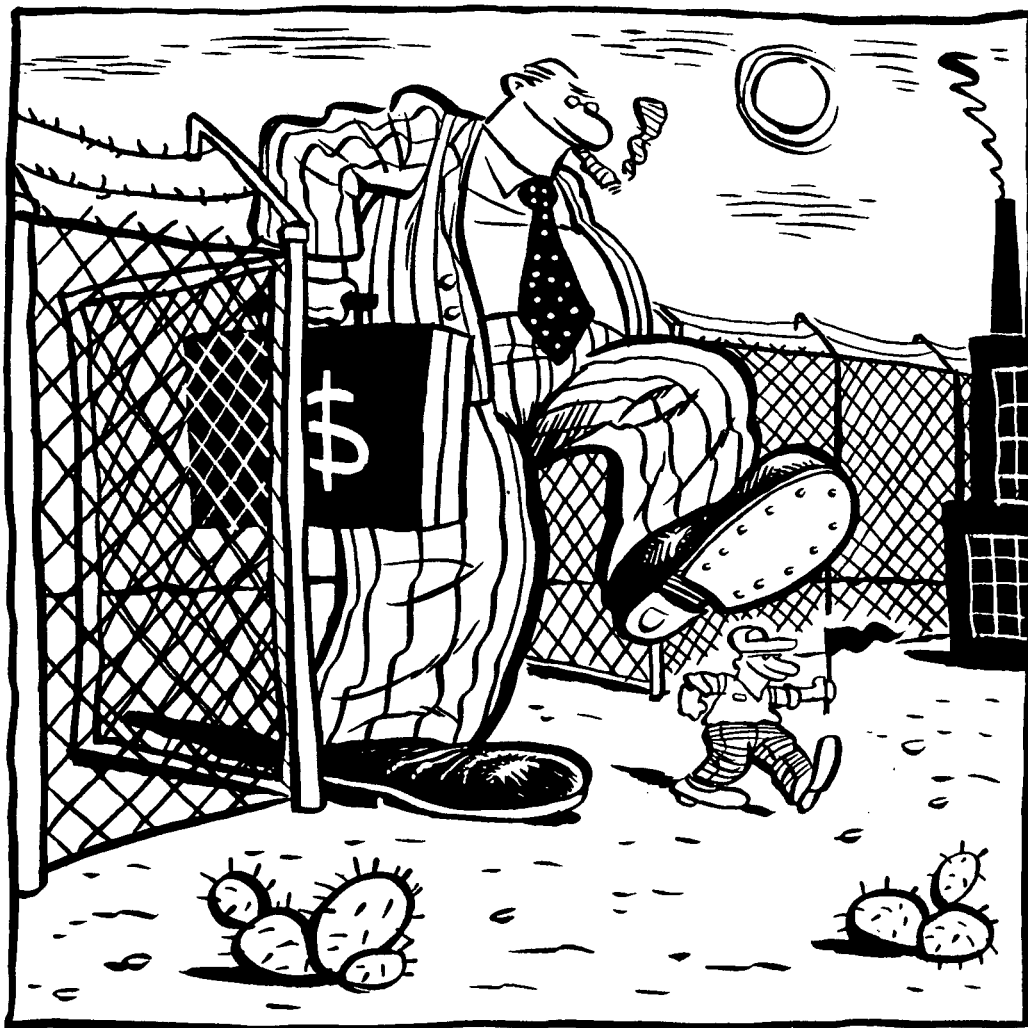
offered in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which is scheduled for a congressional vote later this year.

The GE and Honeywell complaints were brought by two American unions—the Teamsters and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE)—which represent U.S. workers at the two companies. They brought the complaints in cooperation with an independent Mexican metalworkers union, STIMAHCS. The unions charged both companies with illegally firing about 150 Mexican workers who attended off-duty meetings with union organizers in Juarez and Chihuahua. In addition, they claimed Mexican labor officials refused to process an application for union recognition at GE's Juarez plant. They further alleged that GE officials harassed, bribed and threatened workers prior to an election in August 1993 that the union subsequently lost 914-159.

Initially, GE had argued that NAO authorities from the United States had no right to investigate its operations in Mexico. But the NAO decided to review the cases over GE's objection. Under NAALC rules, workers from one country can submit evidence to the NAO in either of the other countries to show that it is failing to enforce its own labor laws. If the NAO finds merit in a Mexican case brought before the NAO in Washington, for example, the U.S. labor secretary can request a meeting with his Mexican counterpart to resolve the dispute. Persistent abuses of health and safety, child labor or wage laws can lead to economic sanctions.

Organizers had hoped that the NAO's review would stir Mexican authorities to inspect the two plants for health and safety violations, overturn the election defeat at GE's Juarez





plant, and reinstate the fired workers. None of those things happened. The unions also hoped that Labor Secretary Reich would invoke the NAALC provisions that call for cabinet-level discussions—and possibly sanctions—to resolve the two disputes. Reich refused. Instead, he suggested that Mexico, the United States and Canada hold a series of low-level seminars to discuss labor law and organizing rights at some undetermined future date.

Reich's decision came after a seven-month investigation that climaxed in the NAO's Washington hearing room on September 12. The one-day hearing received virtually no coverage in the American media.

Mexican workers argued that the companies had systematically violated health, safety and union organizing laws. One of 14 union witnesses, Ofelia Medrano Sanchez, 23, testified that her supervisor had ignored her complaints about epoxy resin fumes at Honeywell's Chihuahua plant where she earned \$5 a day. "That's when I became interested in organizing a union. I organized some meetings in my home, in my friends homes and in the union office," Sanchez said in the hearing.

She said her supervisor offered her money if she would identify union sympathizers at the plant. Three company officials harassed her for four hours one day, alternately promising Sanchez better treatment and then threatening to fire her if she didn't stop trying to organize.

"The following week they began to fire 20 workers, including my sister and the other women who had attended the meetings," Sanchez said in the hearing. Honeywell Public Relations Director Meta Gaertner said Sanchez was fired for "being repeatedly away from her work station" and that the others were simply laid off. "Honeywell recognizes the right to organize and we aren't going to get in the way of that," Gaertner said.

"It's not true," said Sanchez. "All of the women who were fired had participated in the union. In addition, a very

short time after we had been fired, I learned through a friend who worked in the plant that they were hiring more workers."

Four Mexican labor lawyers testified that American companies violate Mexican labor law with impunity because Mexican officials are anxious to please U.S. corporations. The lawyers also argued that officials are hostile to organizing drives by unions that are not affiliated with Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

Blacklists of pro-union workers are shared by management from different companies, said Benedicto Martinez Orozco, the secretary general of STIMAHCS. Martinez also said workers are sometimes forced to sign blank statements that company officials fill out later to provide "cause" for terminations.

"The overwhelming majority of fired workers are obligated to renounce their legal rights through various company maneuvers such as obtaining signatures on blank papers, voluntary resignations and the severance pay system," said Martinez. Because labor officials are slow to resolve complaints brought to Mexico's labor arbitration boards, Mar-

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tinez said, most workers are forced by economic necessity to accept severance pay instead of fighting for their collective bargaining rights.

Despite this compelling testimony, the NAO issued a 33-page report on October 12 that stopped short of making any findings on the merits of the two cases. The report concluded that deciding whether Honeywell and GE had violated Mexican labor laws was beyond the NAO's purview, as GE had originally argued. NAALC's Article 36 does allow labor officials from the United States, Mexico and Canada to take up cases of workers outside their borders when government agencies consistently ignore their own health and safety, child labor, and wage rules. But organizing rights are not included in this category. The NAO agreed with GE that the agency was "not in a position" to determine whether Mexican officials "failed to enforce the relevant labor laws."

A Honeywell spokesperson told *In These Times* that the ruling proved the company was innocent of any wrongdoing. But union officials called the report a whitewash. Cross-border organizers are furious that the NAO—after refusing to investigate organizing violations—did not even consider the health, safety and wage violations that they say led the workers to organize in the first place.

What the NAO can and should do, according to NAO Secretary Irezema Garza, who authored the October report, is gather and publicly report as much information as possi-

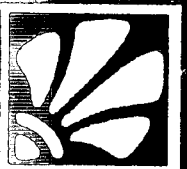
ble about labor practices in Mexico, Canada and the United States. But Garza, who presided at the NAO's Washington hearing, barred the electronic media from recording the proceedings and limited witnesses to about 15 minutes of testimony each, according to one union official. Garza could not be reached for comment.

"I think it was intentionally designed to prevent the emergence of information for public view," said Robin Alexander, the UE's director of International Labor Affairs. "It was the antithesis of what the process should have looked like."

"The only way it could be effective would be if the NAO took its responsibility to investigate seriously and cast major public light on violations," Alexander added. "Every indication is that they are not prepared to do that." Currently, the NAO lacks subpoena power to obtain witnesses and documents, virtually ensuring that vigorous investigations won't be conducted when complaints are filed. Alexander said unions should press the Clinton administration to renegotiate NAALC.

"We were suspicious of [NAALC] from the first," said editor Peter Gilmore of the *UE News*. "But we decided to see if we could play the game by the new rules—and our conclusion is that the game is rigged and the rules have to be changed."

Peter White is a journalist and video producer currently working on a documentary about the economy of Chiapas, Mexico.



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## VIEWPOINT

# Out there

By Scott MacLarty

Coalition-building is to gay advocates as the weather was to Mark Twain: everyone talks about it but no one does anything. This has not always been true. Gay involvement in Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, for example, helped Jackson win a few, mostly white, states during the 1988 presidential race. But since then—and especially since the 1993 March on Washington—gay and lesbian organizations have increased their rhetoric about coalitions but have made weaker and fewer efforts to coalesce.

Michael Bronski, in a recent talk for New York City's Gay Liberation Front, warned, "[I]f the gay movement is going to work in coalition with other movements for social change to defeat the religious right wing, we must re-examine how we think, talk and act." Bronski says that the failure to build a broad coalition movement with gay and non-gay African-Americans can be traced to the gay community's unwillingness to deal with racism, except on the non-confrontational level of "multiculturalism" and "diversity." I see another reason for this failure, albeit one closely related to Bronski's.

The organized gay, lesbian and bisexual community has more recently

limited itself to parochial issues, like the military ban on homosexuality. There is even a current trend, articulated by author Bruce Bawer in *A Place at the Table* and various essays in *The Advocate* and *The New Republic*, to dissociate gay people from other progressive movements altogether. Bawer wants those of us in the gay community to stop confusing our gay genes with our political genes; our sexuality, he claims, doesn't predispose us toward leftism. In a September 20 *Advocate* essay, Bawer calls the 1993 March on Washington a last gasp of the queer left.

Perhaps Bawer is right—but only if he's talking about vaguely progressive organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF). With the election of a gay-friendly president in 1992, such groups suddenly began behaving like conservatives, unwilling to take challenging positions lest they jeopardize their newly gained access to the White House.

Instead, we have Torie Osborne, former NGLTF executive director, writing in *The Advocate* ("Just for the health of it," October 4) about ways a health care reform plan might accommodate gays and lesbians. Any reform

plan. Osborne, like NGLTF and HRCF, refuses to align herself with any specific proposal in Congress. As long as relatively minor adjustments are made in the health plan to satisfy some gay needs, she seems to argue, who cares if the final plan turns out to be an HMO nightmare for working and poor Americans?

I witnessed the same kind of thinking when I attended a planning meeting for the 1993 March on Washington. Throughout 1992, the Direct Action Working Group—with the full support of the rest of the march's steering committee—had organized a major protest for the Monday after the Sunday march. The "Health Care is Right" demo was to take place at the Capitol. We would demand universal health care free from the control of corporate interests.

Suddenly, in February, representatives from HRCF and NGLTF pulled the plug. The steering committee had received a letter from Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) threatening not to endorse the march if there was any association with civil disobedience. Such radical tactics would be inappropriate and misdirected with the new administration and new Congress, he said. "The organizations that have the most influence in Congress do not engage in civil disobedience. They move members of Congress by a combination of reasoned argument and political power. Civil disobedience is more usually resorted to by people who have no access to power."

Members of HRCF and NGLTF, which rely on their connections with insiders like Frank, swelled the Direct Action meeting and thwarted its plans. One NGLTF representative said that the demo would "set us back five years." Health care was no longer our priority, we were told; let's hold a benign rally against the military ban on homos in front of the Pentagon. The steering committee voted to separate the April 26 action



from the April 25 march.

The March on Washington proved a success in terms of numbers (as many as a million people participated) and as the ultimate gay party. But many of our issues were noticeably underplayed, especially at the rally on the Mall at the end of the march. Few speakers discussed the AIDS struggle; noted AIDS activist and writer Larry Kramer was nearly blocked from speaking. None, as I remember it, mentioned health care, and the April 26 action went unannounced. Reggie Williams, who headed the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, was the only person I remember discussing AIDS in any detail.

Barbara Smith wrote in *The Nation* on July 5, 1993, that she's "heard repeatedly since the march ... that it seemed more like a parade than a political demonstration and that the overall image of the hundreds of thousands of participants was overwhelmingly Middle American,

***Despite  
rhetoric about  
coalition-building,  
gay organizations  
are increasingly  
isolated.***

that is, white and conventional." We were force-fed the military ban issue, culminating in a spectacle of gays in uniform marching across the stage and standing at attention.

The April 26 demonstration did take place as planned, with a few hundred diehards showing up and 47 arrested for blocking traffic. Compare this to the action at the Supreme Court, in response to the decision upholding Georgia's sodomy law, two days after the Oct. 11, 1987, march on Washington. Then, thousands demonstrated and 600 were arrested.

It's not that radical queer activists favor the military ban; we simply resent the way it eclipsed the rest of our concerns in 1993. And we'll never forget Clinton's colossal gall in July 1993, when he said that the "don't ask, don't tell" policy was a compromise "acceptable to all of us." The timidity of our "access to the White House" organizations led Clinton to believe he could speak on our behalf.

And despite Rep. Frank's contentions, the gay community has remained very much frozen out of the health care debate. The combined resources of HRCF, NGLTF and the rest of our lobbyists are a drop in the Reflecting Pool compared to those of the insurance, pharmaceutical and other interested industries.

Support from the steering committee and groups like NGLTF and HRCF for the "Health Care Is a Right" demo would at least have educated a lot of gay men and lesbians, motivating them to put pressure on their legislators. Unlike our campaign to end the military ban, a problem restricted to homosexuals, health care remains an issue *equally urgent* to women, the poor, working folks, African-Americans and other ethnic minorities, the aged, people with HIV, sexual minorities ... all of us "other" types. Health care is the best foundation for an effective national coalition, a majority neither the *New York Times* nor Bob Dole could ignore.

Larry Kramer says we've failed because we haven't yet managed to fund a full-time Washington lobbyist. For once I disagree with him. We need organizations willing to motivate people to act on their own behalf, in defense of their own lives. In the September 1994 issue of *DCQ Fag Boy News* (out of Washington, D.C.), editor and ACT UPster Steve Michael quotes Andy Velez: "If one small, old, brown man from India could defeat the British Empire, we can beat AIDS." Velez was also wrong. Millions of Indians defeated the British Empire; Gandhi united them and provided a strategy.

That's what groups like NGLTF, HRCF and AIDS Action Council should be doing. They have the chance, now that Congress has postponed health care reform until 1995. Perhaps recent resignations from NGLTF will bring in replacements more interested in grass-roots organizing than sucking up to the powerful.

On Saturday, Aug. 28, 1993, I attended an early morning rally before the Lincoln Memorial commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the 1963 Civil Rights rally. Only one of the dozen or so speakers mentioned AIDS. None, black or white, mentioned health care. Most, I recall, discussed the theoretical importance of coalitions. A heterosexual African-American unionist stressed the need for an alliance between the gay and labor movements; he might as well have discussed the nice weather.

I also recall the storm of criticism against NGLTF Executive Director Peri Jude Radecic's response to a reporter's question during the November 1993 NGLTF "Creating Change" conference. When asked for an opinion on NAFTA, she said NGLTF had no official position, but she was personally opposed to it. That same month President Clinton blasted labor leaders for having the nerve to lobby Congress against NAFTA. How dare any of us utter a squeak in our own defense against corporate interests!

Of course, there are numerous concerns besides health care reform that might serve as starting points for national coalitions. Lesbian Avengers groups across the United States have involved themselves in everything from pro-choice to immigrants' rights, for example. We need more efforts like these. Unless we can coalesce on something outside our own special interests, we in the gay community will remain an island unto ourselves. Isolation and impotence are not attractive qualities for a movement founded on sexual liberation. ◀

**Scott MacLarty**, a musical theater composer, has been active in ACT UP in Cincinnati and Washington.

# I N T H E A R T S

## Puff fiction

**Quentin  
Tarantino's  
postmodern hit  
has it all—  
except  
substance.**

By Pat Dowell

**I**n *Pulp Fiction*, the hit-man Vincent Vega is ordered by his ruthless boss Marsellus to keep Mrs. Marsellus happy during her husband's absence. Vincent takes her out to dinner. She chooses a place called Jack Rabbit Slim's, a '50s-theme restaurant where members of the waitstaff dress like Buddy Holly and Marilyn Monroe, and you can order a Douglas Sirk steak. Sirk, as about 5,000 graduate students in the country know, is a largely forgotten director of lacquered '50s melodramas whose work was taken up by film theorists in the '70s.

The joke is that writer-director Quentin Tarantino mentions him at all. Tarantino was not a film student, but he is crazy about movies and television, and what Vincent Vega says of Jack Rabbit Slim's is also true of *Pulp Fiction*: "It's like a wax museum with a pulse."

From the recycling of former star John Travolta, whose performance as Vincent has revived his career, to the twist contest at the restaurant that gets the former disco icon out on a dance floor again, *Pulp Fiction*'s aesthetic is defined by the debris of pop culture. The characters speak in the patois of postmodernism, gathering an armful of television characters, movie happenings and the occasional literary reference to make their points.

The sudden violence, the juicy dialogue, the folded narrative with its surprises, the punk-noir sensibility—all are familiar trademarks of Tarantino, the writer/director of *Reservoir Dogs* who also wrote *True Romance* and the first version of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Tarantino is the hottest thing in Hollywood. Critics are panting over him, and he's genuinely clever. He's no slave to the dreary, redundant conventions of American storytelling in the Age of Television. *Pulp Fiction* is exhilarating to watch, and audiences and critics especially seem to love the screwy jumble of allusions to the cultural supermarket.

But there's something sad about Tarantino's talent. It's like those final shots of *Citizen Kane*, when the camera swoops over all of tycoon Charles Foster Kane's acquisitions, the debris of a wasted lifetime. *Pulp Fiction* tours the tchotchkes of Quentin Tarantino's fevered imagination, a collection of bits and pieces of all the movies and TV shows that have seeped into his mind.

There's virtually nothing in it that relates to anything in the "real" world, the place where we *do* things. Tarantino's perspective consists entirely of the media world, where we *watch* things. What's depressing is that this virtual unreality is exactly where so many Americans feel at home right now. It's what makes Tarantino the man of the moment.

It also makes him the new Brian De Palma, a comparison he would probably perceive as a compliment. Like so many of the young action directors, black and white, he admires the man who remade Eliot Ness as Ed Meese in *The Untouchables* and who revived *Scarface* as an anthem of white-flight paranoia about dark-skinned immigrants. No doubt those are not the De Palma accomplishments Tarantino would cite, but rather De Palma's



**Pulp Fiction**  
Directed by Quentin  
Tarantino

stylistic flourishes. You can find the same swooning camera movements and extravagant angles in Tarantino's films, and the same passionate intensity in flatly drawn characters.

Tarantino writes much juicier things for them to say, however, and he's a shrewder sampler of other people's work. He isn't hung up on one director, as De Palma was on Alfred Hitchcock. Tarantino is the autodidact of the video store—where he received his film education while clerking—and he gravitates toward the auteurs of the video market: the obscure masters of action, martial arts and horror. He's got attitude and he's got taste; you can find bits of Robert Aldrich's seminal '50s bad-boy thriller *Kiss Me Deadly* in *Pulp Fiction*, and his style owes much to the delirious excesses of Hong Kong cinema. In fact, *Film*

*Threat* magazine says he lifted *Reservoir Dogs* whole from a Hong Kong hit.

*Pulp Fiction* has a deliberate sense of déjà vu. The boxer (Bruce Willis) who changes his mind about throwing the fight, the henchman (Travolta) who's tempted by his boss' wife (Uma Thurman), the near-death trip that inspires a change of heart are all venerable plot lines that reach back not just to the title's pulp fiction magazines of the '30s and '40s but beyond to ancient storytellers. Tarantino dresses them up in postmodern duds, relying wholly on the American media mantle of our after-Vietnam malaise to smother whatever uncool social relevance or meaning might still cling to them.

Which is not to say that *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* are not political. Tarantino's conscientious effort to avoid any taint of a reality outside the hermetically sealed world of these faux felons is itself significant, and his whole enterprise is glued together with a rampant dose of geek macho, expressed in a white-boy fascination with mostly black pop clichés of toughness.

Tarantino draws on the blaxpotation movies of the '70s for the look of Jules, Vincent's black, Bible-spouting partner



(Samuel L. Jackson), and for much of the movie's gangsta swagger and tough talk. If you're going to flout the current anti-violence mood with a cavalier attitude to bloodletting, Tarantino seems to think, only black icons will really do the job. *Pulp Fiction* is a movie conceived by a guy who wishes he were a "bad mother-fucker," the words stitched on Jules' wallet, by which the character distinguishes it from all the other filched wallets when he tries to get it back in a restaurant holdup scene. A recent interview with Tarantino reveals that it is his own wallet now.

This hunger for vicarious virility can also be found in many of the reviewers of *Pulp Fiction*, and their orgasmic praise not only confirms that it's been slim pickins at the multiplex lately, but that we pale, quiet creatures who spend our days and nights in a screening room are just as susceptible as video-store clerks to the promise of easy, armed potency that is a constant backbeat in not only pulp fiction but most of pop culture. Quentin Tarantino brings cleverness to the mix, but when you leave the theater, *Pulp Fiction* fades rather quickly, just like all the other junk eye candy. It's a cute movie—nothing less, and, just as important, nothing more. ◀



# IN PRINT

## Still a good fight

By Paul Buhle

**T**he Spanish Civil War has proved to be the most enduring lost cause of the century. For a moment during the anti-fascist enthusiasm of World War II, the brave defense of Spanish democracy by American citizen-soldier-idealists a few years earlier even threatened to become the romantic set-piece of the age. In *Casablanca*, Humphrey Bogart's unforgettable Rick confessed that he had run weapons to the Loyalists, decisive proof that behind the cynical exterior lay a generous heart. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway's characters fight with a similar mixture of idealism and existentialism—hardly hoping to win but determined to fight the evil spreading through the world.

In real life, Loyalist troops practically introduced *partisan*-style guerrilla warfare, and their practical experience as well as their international contacts later proved invaluable to the Allied war effort. In losing, they had somehow also won.

By the late '30s, however, the Dies Committee was already investigating survivors of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion for early signs of disloyalty. By 1950, the vets were pursued collectively and individually by the FBI, blacklisted from jobs and branded the cowardly agents of Stalin by politicians and journalists who never saw an hour of real anti-fascist combat. Decades later, Ronald Reagan—who spent World War II in Hollywood, making frequent public appearances with Spanish Civil War veterans and other left-wingers—told reporters that the volunteers had fought for the wrong side.

Peter N. Carroll, author of a superb everyday-life study of the '70s, *It Seemed Like Nothing Ever Happened*, has returned to the bloody battlefields of the war and the murky political debates in its aftermath, sifting familiar evidence, interviewing large numbers of vets and poring through previously unknown archival materials in Moscow. One could never describe Carroll as neutral: he is the chair of the Board of Governors of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. But he is also probably the least partisan of the various authors—usually polemicists for one side or another in the various controversies—to describe the American combat-

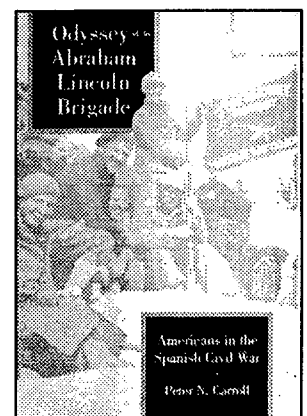
ants since their return from Spain in 1938.

As an oral history document, *The Odyssey* is a brilliant effort, marked by sensitivity to the interviewees and a deep feeling for their experience before and after Spain. Previous volumes, such as Arthur Landis' *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (1968), unearthed considerable battlefield evidence, and Robert Rosenstone's *Crusade of the Left* (1969) provided an important measure of political context on the home front. But Carroll goes deeper into the personalities of the vets, and the after-effects of the war upon them.

Carroll traces the awakening of future combatants to radicalism and to the prospects of volunteering to fight in a war most Americans regarded as utterly distant and unwanted. The volunteers were mostly Jewish and working-class, but the admixture of Yankee radicals, creative writers, African-American politicians and idealists makes for a fascinating story. The book moves along through the various ups and downs of extremely active and generally admirable lives in which the memory of Spain plays a still central role.

Unfortunately, Carroll's account, drawn from the perspective of the vets themselves, allows too little for the contradictions that have bothered so many others, from war observers to scholars. The Lincolns fought for freedom—but volunteering for duty in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion depended in most if not all cases on a firm belief in the world Communist movement under Moscow's leadership. This came at a time when the lack of internal party democracy in America and growing tendencies to despotism in Russia turned many an erstwhile party member away in disillusionment. Furthermore, volunteering took a kind of personal recklessness that friends, shopmates, wives and mothers could often scarcely understand. The issue raises psychological questions unresolvable by political interpretation alone and not fully answered by the vets' own accounts.

In the end, about 2,600 Americans fought in Spain, with another 150 serving as doctors, nurses, technicians and drivers. So outgunned were they by Francisco Franco's army and its German and Italian suppliers that the situation would have been almost comical were it not so tragic. (Observer George Orwell agreed, writing in 1943: "The Fascists won because they were the stronger; they had the modern arms and the others hadn't. No political strategy could offset that.") Virtually untrained men with nothing but raw courage and ideological persuasion confronted their own well-founded fears. To hold the line against the



**The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade**  
By Peter N. Carroll  
Stanford University Press  
439 pp., \$16.95. (\$55 hd)

Fascists was miraculous; to have done more was impossible. Narrating their tale, Carroll brings us back to some of the most hair-raising military adventures of the century, and to some of the most interesting as well as unlikely combatants the printed page may ever see. He skillfully untangles some old mysteries and humanizes the historic picture in a remarkably candid and straightforward manner, disarming the reader who has plowed through too many ideology-laden histories of the war.

It would be pleasant to leave the story here, with ragged heroes at the front and determined organizers (such as *In These Times*' former co-publisher Bill Sennett) bringing up the rear. But the brave figures had been plunged into a political situation they understood badly, and readers will find little here to help them sort it all out. At the election of a Popular Front government in 1936, thousands of Spanish farmers simply ceased paying rent to landlords, agricultural day laborers occupied the land they cultivated, villages dumped municipal councils and put their own democratic forms in place, railwaymen struck to demand nationalization of railroads, and many other workers moved toward socialization of their workplaces. Instead of quashing these revolutionary anarchists and syndicalists, Fascist leader Francisco Franco's revolt only strengthened their resolve. They practically extinguished the existing state apparatus across Catalonia and in many rural locations, replacing them with the most advanced socialistic or cooperative institutions yet seen in the modern world.

Of course, Stalin had no intention of encouraging the kind of revolutionary behavior that had made the Russian workers' councils (i.e., soviets) possible a generation earlier. In a perverse sequel to the events of 1914, when Europe's socialist and anarchist leaders widely betrayed their ideals by enlisting in the war that opened the continent to mass destruction and soon to fascism, Comintern leaders set themselves on eradicating the Spanish revolution in the name of anti-fascism. The Loyalist government, dependent upon Russian support, did everything possible to sabotage industrial and agrarian self-management, while supplies and propaganda built up a Spanish Communist Party that had never previously been a particularly important or attractive vehicle.

The American volunteers hardly registered the significance of these developments. Willing to die to defeat Franco's armies as the advance guard of Hitler and Mussolini, they knew only of anarchist "disruptions" weakening the fight. Could not a revolutionary nation have fought Franco more effectively? The debate is still open. But if Stalin's behavior rightly finds few defenders anywhere on earth

these days, the willingness of the United States, France and Britain to appease even the most bloodthirsty anti-communists before 1941 and after 1945 casts a pall over liberalism as large as that over Stalinism. Stalin may have undermined the fight against fascism in the pursuit of his own goals, but in their dubious "neutrality" the nations of the West in fact favored Franco.

In the aftermath of Spain, World War II became inevitable. So did the complex and convoluted war over the legacy of the defeated American volunteers. Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was bitterly condemned by Communist Party officials (a few vets privately offered him their apologies). After the honeymoon period of World War II, when Hollywood Communists actually wrote dialogue for some of the best battle pictures, the Cold War wiped out any temporary gains in public sympathy. Increasingly persecuted, the veterans probably

hit a low point of political morale in 1953 when Dwight Eisenhower signed a mutual assistance pact with the slippery old enemy, Franco.

The Lincolns, nevertheless, trudged on, many of them active in the civil rights and, later, anti-war movements. The '80s found them raising funds and consciousness for the revolutionary government of Nicaragua—besieged by contras who looked very much like Franco's legions and by backers like Oliver North sounding strangely like the '30s U.S. fascist sympathizers. Getting old and weak but still proud in defeat, the vets could be seen in any mass Washington demonstration, carrying their aged banners. A few were even on hand for the turnout against the Gulf War. Most have long since abandoned faith in Communism with a big "C," but not in the cooperative visions that inspired their sacrifice.

Carroll waxes sentimental about the old idealists, which is natural and perhaps inevitable. True to the contemporary impulse behind oral history, it's the culture of the war that seems the most intriguing at the moment. To mark the 60th anniversary of the conflict next year, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, based at Brandeis University, has a traveling exhibit of the posters made for the Loyalists by some of the most famed artists of the times, in styles that range from socialist realism to dadaism and constructivism. A happy eclecticism and a salute to utopianism as well as determination, this may offer, along with Carroll's book, the best way yet to remember the Lincolns' crusade. ◀

Paul Buhle founded the Oral History of the American Left archive at Tamiment Library, New York University. His next book, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953)*, is due out in December from Humanities Press.



Poets Langston Hughes and Edwin Rolfe both served in Spain.

# Elvis and Fidel

By Christopher Phelps

The first North Americans to join up with Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement in the Sierra Maestra were not cadres of the organized left or professional adventurers but three army brats—juvenile delinquents, in effect—who had run away from the Guantanamo naval base. Their motivations were scarcely political. "We just heard so much about how, uh, about how Batista was so cruel and he was a dictatorship, and how with the war in Hungary and the people fighting for people there, we just felt moved to come here," Chuck Ryan, at 21 years the oldest of the boys, told a documentary filmmaker at the time.

The highly original, if sometimes stretched, thesis of Van Gosse's *Where the Boys Are* is that such impulses to act in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution in its earliest moments derived less from conventional left-wing political commitments than from a romantic ethos of youthful male rebellion extending from pop-culture "bad boys" like James Dean and Elvis Presley to the virile figure of Fidel Castro himself. In an age of bland paternalism, symbolized by the fatherly Eisenhower, "*fidelismo* signalled a reassertion of creative and heroic masculinity in the widest sense."

North American youths transferred to Cuba's bearded ones the mystique of an imagined world of rebellious possibility first glimpsed in movies like *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild One*. In 1957, Hank di Suvero, who later founded SLATE, the Berkeley student party that helped create a new campus radicalism, hatched a scheme for joining the Cuban rebels that involved seven undergraduate friends and two jeeps. A similarly juvenile fascination with the revolution was explored in Glendon Swarthout's 1960 novel *Where the Boys Are*, in which several college boys attempt to prolong their 1958 spring break with a half-assed plan to get their fellow Florida revelers to join them on an expedition to Cuba. (Hollywood expunged the Cuba subplot from its film version of the novel.)

Even the angry young writers of the Beat generation were drawn to Fidel's allure. "The grounding of Yankee

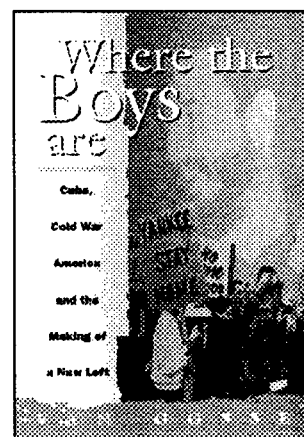
*fidelismo*," Gosse writes, "was the extrapolitical world of spontaneous action for its own sake, what Norman Mailer defined as Hipsterism." Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and LeRoi Jones were all moved to write poems and prose of solidarity. New York bohemians even formed a League of Militant Poets, imploring the world in May 1962: "Put your bombs away. Don't waste blood fighting history in Vietnam, Laos, Cuba. Turn with us to love, beauty and the dream of Whitman."

*Where the Boys Are* is distinguished from the current blizzard of books on Cuba and the United States because it traces the countries' relations in popular consciousness and social movements, not state policy. Its bold emphasis on the significance of male solidarity sets it apart from conventional histories of '60s radicalism.

Yet Gosse's partisanship for the New Left costs him the opportunity to more frankly and critically explore its failings. Often this political weakness is compounded by a curious unwillingness to examine the very paradoxes Gosse's own cultural analysis brings to the fore. For example, the very factors that lent appeal to the Cuban rebels—the reception of Fidel as a Hollywood hero, the romance of action for action's sake, the aspiration to dispense with theory, the cult of youth and style—replicated dominant patterns of culture in the United States, making the early New Left as much a product of advanced capitalism as a challenge to it.

It is strange, too, that a study so informed by gender analysis gives no consideration to how the allure of *fidelismo* affected the internal character of the New Left. Did the appeal of *machismo* reinforce the notorious chauvinism of male leaders in the civil rights and antiwar movements? Homosexuality, too, is given short shrift, despite the evident homoerotic appeal of *fidelismo*—itself a peculiarity, given Castro's hostility to homosexuality. Gosse ignores entirely the disenchantment with Cuba experienced by many gay New Leftists, prominent among them Alan Young, whose book *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution* poignantly recounted the contradictions between his sexual and political identities.

*Where the Boys Are* also suffers from the unspoken presumption that any criticism of the Cuban state puts one on the slippery slope to counterrevolution. One is either a *fidelista* or in the camp of empire. And so a group of socialists who accompanied their public condemnation of the Bay of Pigs invasion with



**Where the Boys Are:**  
Cuba, Cold War America  
and the Making  
of a New Left  
By Van Gosse  
Verso  
259 pp., \$18.95





Gosse proves conclusively that opposition to empire played a noble part in the birth of the New Left and was not, as many '60s chronicles imply, merely a feature of the naive Third World romanticism of the late '60s. Unlike many studies, his goes well beyond the white student left to include African-American contributions to the early New Left. But not every aspect of the story Gosse tells fits comfortably within the two tenets of his argument: that the Old Left was stuck in the mud and that the inspiration for early New Left identification with Cuba was an ethic of male solidarity.

A case in point is the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), an organization whose history Gosse is the first to portray in real detail. Fair Play was founded by journalist Robert Taber and liberal Democrat Alan Sagnar, neither of whom had ties to the organized left. But the sparkplug who fired the organization was Berta Green, a Socialist Workers Party member. As Fair Play's informal national secretary, Green was able to act propitiously by drawing upon Trotskyist activists around the country, initiating numerous chapters and tripling the size of the FPCC in a year. What motivated a woman like Berta Green? Certainly not a desire to express her heroic masculinity.

Perplexingly, Gosse decides to conclude his narrative with the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961. But the Cuban missile crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, was equally formative for many future New Leftists. The experience of total terror laid bare the militarist face of liberalism to many, helping to push a new generation toward radicalism. By the late '60s, Che had become a radical icon—his face adorning dorm room walls, his slogans present even at the chaotic final convention of

the Students for a Democratic Society. Gosse, by limiting his focus to a few short years, has forsaken much of the story of Cuba and the New Left.

*Where the Boys Are* might better have spent a little more time where the editors are. Gosse often leaves bold propositions unsubstantiated and falls into jargon. Hidden meanings become "subtexts," themes "tropes," and "foreground" (alas) a verb. If the duty of revolutionaries is to make the revolution, the task of historians, especially revolutionary historians, is to write history well. It may take two, three, many books to fully satisfy our need for a comprehensive examination of Cuba and the New Left. But in the meantime, *Where the Boys Are* is the best that we've got.

Christopher Phelps is an editor of *Against the Current* and a member of the Rochester Committee on Latin America.

critical remarks on Cuba's lack of democracy become in Gosse's eyes casualties of Cold War ideology, "unable to move beyond an obsessive anti-Communism." The reluctance of *The National Guardian* and *The Militant* to jump on the *fidelistas* bandwagon in 1958 and 1959 is taken as evidence that Old Leftists had "internalized their own isolation."

But the concerns of the Old Left editors—who noted that Castro was a middle-class lawyer without a working-class base or politics—now seem prescient. Had both papers kept to that kind of socialist analysis and resisted the uncritical enthusiasm they later displayed, the American left might now possess a better comprehension of the unpleasant terminus of Cuban Communism. Gosse writes as though nothing happened between 1959 and the present to give anyone doubts about the revolution's "radically democratic and practically socialist core."

# Homeless bound

By David Moberg

**T**he itinerant poor have long been a feature of the social landscape, but today's homeless are different from the wandering mendicants of the Middle Ages, the hobos and tramps of late-19th-century America or the Skid Row inhabitants of the 1950s. They often seem to be much worse off than their counterparts of recent decades. Yet, despite the flood of writings about them, who they are and how they came to be homeless remains something of a puzzle to most Americans.

In *The Homeless*, Christopher Jencks, the distinguished Northwestern University sociologist who has written extensively on social inequality, attempts to sort through the statistics to provide both some explanations of the current crisis—and some suggestions for alleviating it. Though his work greatly increases our understanding of the social roots of homelessness, it still leaves many questions unanswered.

Jencks eschews the ethnographic approach of other recent social scientists, who have spent time observing the homeless on the streets or in shelters. He also distances himself from the more passionate partisans of the homeless. Jencks claims they have often twisted or inflated facts to fit their agenda, but he ultimately agrees that government can and should offer at least minimal housing for everyone.

Estimates of the homeless have ranged as high as 2 to 3 million. But during the '80s, Jencks argues, the number of homeless at any given time—on the streets or in shelters—grew from about 100,000 in 1980 to 200,000 in 1984 and to 400,000 in 1988. However, most of the homeless were at least sporadically sheltered—going back and forth from insecure lodgings to the street.

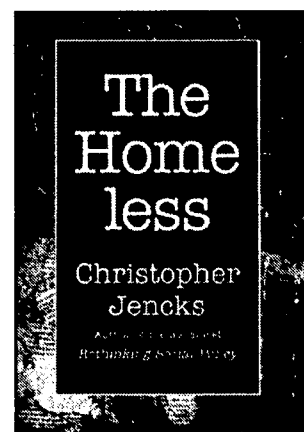
The long-term homeless were more likely to be unskilled black men who had weak families, no money and troubles with alcohol, drugs and delusions. Homeless women, men with social or job skills, and people without mental or substance abuse problems were likely to spend a shorter time on the street. Ultimately, Jencks concludes that the number of people who were homeless during any one year in the late '80s was close to 1.2 million. This number, based on a sur-

vey of people in conventional households who said they had spent time in a shelter or on the streets in the past five years, seems conservative but reasonable.

Why the increase? Jencks weighs many liberal and conservative explanations, concluding that there was no one cause—and consequently that there is no one solution. The principal causes, he argues, were the elimination of involuntary commitment of the mentally ill, the eviction of mental hospital patients with nowhere else to go, the crack epidemic, increasing long-term joblessness and political restrictions on the creation of "flophouses." Noticeably absent from Jencks' list are two of the most popular explanations—a crisis in affordable housing and the Reagan administration's social and economic policies.

Most observers have long agreed that many of the homeless suffer mental illnesses. They are seen as accidental victims of the policies of "deinstitutionalizing" the mentally ill, which has occurred in four waves since the '50s, according to Jencks. Since the '70s it has become very difficult to involuntarily confine anyone to an institution. Although the proponents of deinstitutionalization argued for continued care but in a community setting, conservative state governments saw deinstitutionalization simply as an excuse to cut budgets.

It is true, Jencks writes, that most of today's homeless are not people who have been pushed out of mental hospitals. Less than one-fourth of the homeless have spent time in mental hospitals and the trend to deinstitutionalize the mentally ill began in the '50s, long before homelessness became a problem. Yet, Jencks argues, the trend to deinstitutionalization is a major cause of homelessness. He contends that roughly one-third of the homeless suffer delusions and probably would have been confined in an earlier era. Ironically, Jencks notes, despite attempts at both the state and federal level (under Reagan) to cut spending on the mentally ill by deinstitutionalizing them, in many cases the costs have only been shifted, or states have ended up saving far less than they imagined they would. For example, by the late '80s a record percentage of the population received federal benefits under Social Security for mental disabilities. Yet many of the mentally ill do not receive the help they need. When liberal ideas on the rights of the mentally ill were combined with conservative budget-cutting, Jencks concludes, the result was a disaster—a great increase in homelessness but with more shifting of costs than real savings.



**The Homeless**  
By Christopher Jencks  
Harvard University Press  
161 pp., \$17.95

While persuasive on the role played by cutting mental health programs and institutions, Jencks does not make as solid a case that the use of crack is responsible for the current crisis. Citing a New York City study of urine samples, Jencks estimates that one-third of the homeless in the '80s regularly used crack. That figure is far higher than other studies, which estimate that 10 percent of the homeless abuse drugs. But even if the numbers Jencks cites are true, the evidence is insufficient to declare crack a major cause of new homelessness. We don't know how much crack the homeless consume or how severely it disrupts their lives—especially outside of New York, where crack has been a far greater problem than elsewhere. In addition, there is likely a significant overlap in the homeless population that abuses alcohol—estimated at 30 percent of the homeless—and those who abuse crack or other drugs. In that case, crack may worsen their individual problems, but it probably would not raise the numbers of homeless significantly above what simple, old-fashioned drunkenness does.

Jencks' major contribution to the debate on homelessness is to focus attention on how declining wages, an inadequate job market and the gutting of income supports like Aid to Families With Dependent Children are the most important causes of homelessness.

Jencks argues that the leading reason for the growth in the homeless population is the decline in demand for unskilled labor, especially casual day work. (However, he does not reconcile this development with the apparent growth of a market for unskilled, illegal immigrant workers. Perhaps they have contributed to a surplus of unskilled laborers at a time when some traditional casual labor markets were drying up or being replaced by new styles of temporary work agencies.) From the late '60s to the late '80s the percentage of men with no or extremely low earnings increased substantially. Women, a small fraction of the homeless, may have also become more vulnerable because of a decline in the likelihood and stability of marriage. For women, these social changes coincided with a period of

declining real value of welfare payments.

Jencks overstates his case when he argues that homelessness was not primarily a result of inadequate supplies of low-income housing. For many people it seems self-evident that homelessness rose because housing costs in recent decades have outstripped income or that there haven't been enough low-income housing units built. Jencks concedes that a housing-cost squeeze may be part of the problem, largely because incomes stagnated, but he rejects much of the argument that an affordable housing crisis led to homelessness.

Jencks notes that while old Skid Rows with their single-room occupancy or cubicle hotels were destroyed in many cities, the total number of one-room rental units remained fairly stable through the '70s and '80s. When the economy was strong in the early '70s, poor renters upgraded to a room with a bath and kitchen, and much of the cheapest housing was demolished. Then, when poverty began to increase in the early '80s, demand outstripped remaining supply, and rents rose sharply. By that time, Jencks argues, city building codes and neighborhood resistance blocked the rebuilding of the old flophouses. If these obstacles did impede poor Americans' access to housing—and Jencks suggests this is so—that undercuts his argument that there was not a lack of low-cost housing in the '80s.

From 1970 to 1989

there was a decline in the number of low-rent units—which included both single-room units and multi-room apartments that rented for less than \$250 a month in 1989 dollars. During that time the population of low-income renters shot up by half, according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Nevertheless, Jencks claims that there was no real shortage of low-rent units in the late '80s. A U.S. census survey shows that in the '70s and '80s landlords reported a slightly higher vacancy rate for very low-rent apartments than for more expensive ones. This suggests, Jencks writes, that poor people chose to spend more in order to get higher quality (and safer) rooms. If one looks at most official income figures, it appears that many low-income renters were spending at least half of their





income on rent and utilities by the end of the decade. But Jencks says these official income figures are deceptive. Jencks argues that the poor found other, unreported sources of income to meet their housing costs. He supports this contention by relying heavily on the Census Bureau's Consumer Expenditure Survey, which indicates that rent and utilities accounted for about the same percentage of poor tenants' expenditures in 1990 as in 1972.

Because much cheap housing is so undesirable, Jencks concludes, many poor people found ways to afford somewhat better accommodations. Yet if there are empty rooms in crumbling buildings in extremely unsafe neighborhoods, can poor people's decision to avoid renting them be taken as proof that there is not a lack of affordable—and half-decent—housing? The long waiting lists for public housing, much of which is extremely unsafe and unattractive, suggests that he gives too much weight to the vacancy statistics.

Despite his achievement in calling attention to the problem of falling incomes and legislative stinginess in aid to single mothers, ultimately it seems that Jencks understates the problems with the supply of satisfactory low-cost housing as a contribution to the problem of homelessness.

Why did homelessness continue to increase when the economy improved in the late '80s? Jencks suggests that much of the reason (aside from the crack epidemic) is that more people moved into shelters out of doubled-up living quarters. In other words, the existence of shelters served to generate a new epidemic of homelessness by making the condition more tolerable. There is some anecdotal support for this: a few years ago in Orlando, Fla., a new shelter was flooded with people who moved out of a mission settlement that charged them \$7 a day. But there are problems with the argument. Jencks notes, for example, that only one-third, maybe one-half, of homeless single adults used shelters on an average night because they found the streets—or even jail—preferable.

Jencks' proposals attempt to balance social responsibility and a pessimistic sense of what is now politically possible. First, he insists that the homeless need better housing that offers more privacy than today's dormitory-style shelters. He favors raising welfare benefits to levels that permit recipients to rent decent apartments in the private housing market.

If voters or politicians insist that single mothers should work, he warns that the public cost may actually rise: someone else will have to provide child care, and public subsidies will be needed to supplement the low wages most welfare mothers would likely earn. Expanding rent subsidies to include everyone who is supposed to be covered by today's laws—that is, those earning half or less of the median U.S. income—would require a doubling of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's current \$18 billion low-income housing budget.

Finally, Jencks argues that America's large underclass and homeless ranks

(especially compared to Western Europe) are a product of the flexible labor policies of American-style capitalism. America's raw, free-market policies generate inequality, job instability and declining incomes that are inadequately offset by social income or housing supports. These policies, which are antithetical to social solidarity, increase as well the burden of mental illness, alcoholism and drug abuse that drag the homeless into society's lower depths. Without sustained periods of full employment, the homeless are not likely to find stable jobs. The alternative, Jencks writes, is to develop a business culture (and, one might add, a political culture) that values social solidarity as much as efficiency.

In the short run, Jencks says, local governments could run a day labor market that would give casual workers access to private jobs or to low-wage public employment as a backup. That would mean a single man could work a few hours a day and thus get a voucher for a small cubicle room and enough money for three meals and a few bucks of spending money. It is less than homeless advocates want but more than is likely to be adopted.

Jencks also argues that the United States could, as is the case in Western Europe, provide the mentally ill with jobs protected from the pressures of the market—or at least raise disability benefits and provide housing vouchers. Ultimately, he concludes, governments are only likely to fulfill their responsibility to house and care for the mentally ill if there is some provision for involuntary confinement. That seems like an unnecessarily harsh adaptation to our uncaring political climate.

In the final analysis, whatever their own many personal shortcomings, the homeless wander our streets because we, as a society, have not decided to house and care for them. At the very least, Jencks concludes, we have the resources to keep them off the street, and "because we can, we should."

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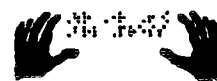
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*Continued from page 40*

has a young generation been so critical," he wrote in 1970, "and so mature in its criticism of advertising." This was a standard line during the late '60s, as marketing men marveled at the generation that TV had created. A spokesman for a hip marketing concern called "Youth Concepts, Inc." told *Advertising Age* in 1967 that "You've got to be honest with these kids, direct. Kids know more than they used to. ... You put on a film, or a commercial that looks like an old Army training film, and they tune you out. These are kids who've been raised on TV."

And so it goes. "Busters respond best to messages that take a self-mocking tone," market researcher Judith Langer tells us today. "What works is advertising that is funny and hip and says, 'Hey, we know.'"

The boomers, too, were said to respond best to a combination of "wit, honesty, verve, self-deprecation, [and] irreverence," as an article in *Business Horizons* explained in 1970. An executive from a youth-oriented agency told *Madison Avenue* magazine in 1968 that "Honesty and fantasy are important to the TV generation. ... They like the point of view that shows the advertiser doesn't take himself too seriously." Merle Steir, a specialist in youth marketing, informed his fellow admen in 1967 that in order to sell "the Now People," "Businessmen will have to be outrageous. Being in step today is to be out of step tomorrow."

This infatuation with the counter-culture was in some ways the inevitable outgrowth of what admen liked to call the "creative revolution" of the early '60s. Advertising, the revolutionaries had realized, functioned most effectively not when bound by strict rules of propriety but in a climate of perpetual difference and never-ending novelty. Advertising had to shock or unsettle the viewer to work, and consuming became a matter of violating established tastes rather than conforming to them. Burger King may have adopted the hip slogan "Sometimes You Gotta Break the Rules" to appeal to disaffect-

ed youth in the '90s, but rule-breaking was enshrined on Madison Avenue much earlier. "Rules are what the artist breaks; the memorable never emerged from a formula" was one of the aphorisms of Bill Bernbach, the central figure of the creative revolution. Chester Posey expressed a common view of his colleagues when he wrote in 1965, "I believe that effective advertising must be incompatible with an indifferent opinion of a product ... that it must be interruptive, disquieting, challenging, surprising and unsettling."

So when a "revolutionary" youth culture arrived at the end of the decade, it was simply fitted into the appropriate niche: the new nonconformist consumers for the new nonconformist advertising. The discovery of the rule-breaking boomers merely cemented the victory of the advertising revolution, and the discovery of their successors in the '90s has breathed new life (and new imagery) into the basic wisdom established during those years: hipness is the lifeblood of mass culture.

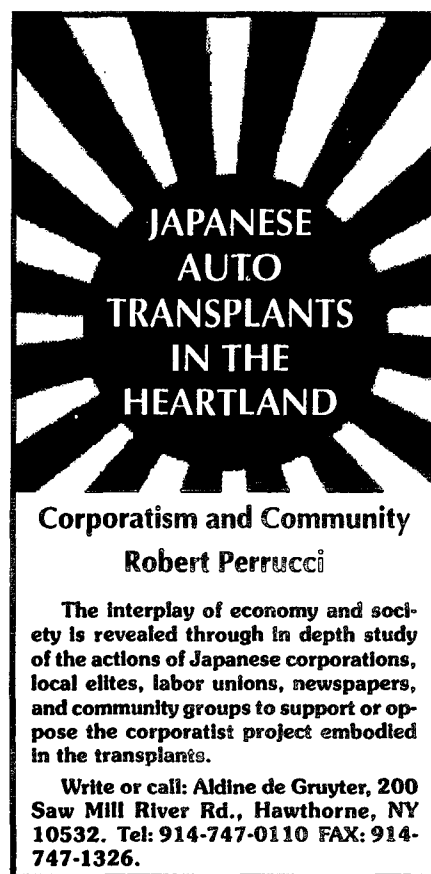
Naturally, the media's recent infatuation with "Generation X" has little to do with the actual cultural production of young people. Business finds whatever it chooses to find in youth culture, and any third-rate reporter can think of a dozen "childhood influences" or other pseudo-historical platitudes to rationalize whatever identity it is they are seeking to pin on the demographic at hand. The strange fact is that business always seems to want the same thing.

Thus, youth culture will always be found to fit the same rebel profile, will always be understood as an updating of the consumerist hedonism and anti-Puritanism of the '60s original. Its look and sound must continually vary, but its cultural task does not change. No matter what the kids are actually doing, youth culture à la Pepsi will always be the same, a flamboyant affirmation of the core tenets of postmodern consumerism: "irreverence" toward everything that is even vaguely "established" (except for the rule of business, of course); an irresistible

hunger for the new; orgasmic liberation through products; a sneering disdain for the restraint and "conformity" of the old folks. Youth culture means just one thing: a perpetual revolution of tastes, values and styles; a living symbol for advertising's manufacturing of endless consumer discontent.

So every few years, it seems, a new rebel youth culture must appear in order to replenish the culture industry's depleted arsenal of cool. New generations render obsolete the old, new celebrities render the old ones ridiculous, and on and on in an ever-ascending spiral of hip upon hip. As adman Merle Steir wrote back in 1967, "Youth has won. Youth must always win. The new naturally replaces the old." And so we will have new generations of youth rebellion as certainly as we will have new generations of mufflers or toothpaste or footwear. ▲

Tom Frank is an editor of *The Baffler*, a magazine published in Chicago.

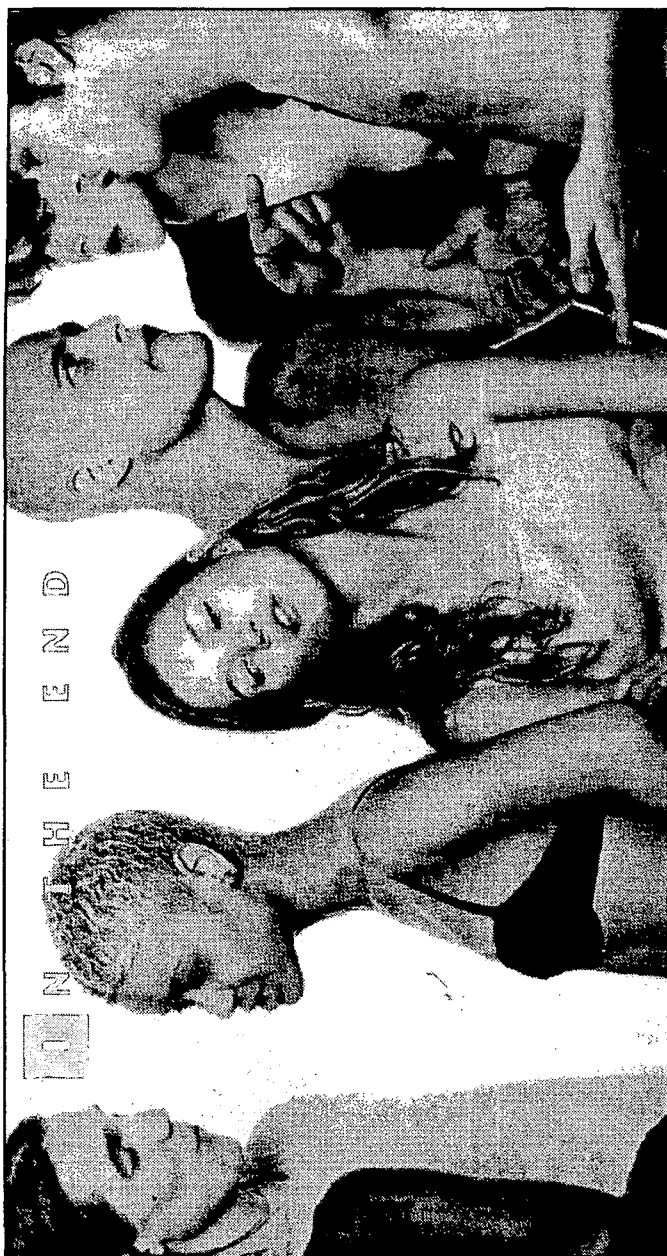


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# rebel, rebel

By Tom Frank

**H**ow dark things must have seemed on Madison Avenue back in 1992, with riots breaking out in Los Angeles, nasty wars flaring up all over the just-freed Eastern bloc, and an unpleasantly intractable recession giving the lie to the happy platitudes that had long defined American consuming life everywhere. How fervently the diviners of America's public mind must have wished for some new mass-cultural dispensation, some array of symbols and celebrities, that would make them relevant again, that would re-establish their leadership in the great cor-

Gen Xers push cologne for Calvin Klein.

porate race to stay forever hip. How they must have cursed the fates that had saddled them with such transparently fake frontmen as M.C. Hammer, Vanilla Ice, the New Kids on the Block.

**And how they must have rejoiced** when the leading minds of the culture industry announced the discovery of an all-new angry generation, the "twentysomethings," complete with a panoply of musical styles, hairdos and verbal signifiers ready-made to rejuvenate advertising's sagging credibility. After all, nothing fuels postmodern consumerism better than rebel youth culture, even if it has to be crammed down the throats of the very people it's supposed to be representing.

**So before too long viewers were besieged with a new generation** of ads—more street-smart, cynical and daring than ever before—starring a new generation of rebel youngsters and promoting a new generation of snappier cars, livelier soda pops and more defiant washing machines. These days, Sprite employs hip-hop poetry to shake its corporate fist at the Man, the Pepsi Generation moshes to "grunge" and even staid Coca-Cola offers products described as "phat."

**Admen have long had a special fondness** for youth culture, recognizing in its frenzied, style-conscious doings a succinct and dramatic symbol of the frantic flight from demon obsolescence that drives consumer capitalism. Back in the mid-'60s, as the nation first became aware of a counterculture living out its wildest consumer fantasies, admen began to feel a strong kinship between their own profession and the noisy, defiant doings of insurgent youth. And by the end of the decade, admen were the hippest guys on the commuter train. Trade publications carefully specified the length of their hair and their tastes in rock music, articles discussed the inspirational usefulness of certain popular drugs, and even the most corporate agencies scrambled to snap up the latest in psychedelic visual techniques and revolutionary hip language.

**But the truly revealing parallel** between admen's understanding of alienated youth then and now is the astonishing similarity of details. Then, as now, the business community responded to a perceived bulge on their demographic charts with a flurry of alarmed youth profiles and hand-wringing editorials in trade magazines. And strangely enough, the characteristics that advertisers attributed to the "boomers" 25 years ago are identical to the characteristics advertisers today ascribe to the "Busters" and "Xers."

**"They are very savvy consumers,"** *Business Week* now informs us, "far more knowledgeable about and suspicious of advertising than earlier generations passing through their twenties." *Advertising Age* concurs: "They are media savvy but are said to feel alienated from the mainstream culture...."

**Exactly the same characteristic was imputed** to young people during the counterculture years. E.B. Weiss, who wrote about youth-market issues for *Advertising Age*, expressed the identical observation in remarkably similar language. "Never

*Continued on page 39*